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OR, THE
High Roller's Dual Game
A STORY OF
THE INVISIBLE LEAGUE.

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AUTHOR OF "THE PLANTER DETECTIVE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE UNKNOWN.

THE wind was blowing a gale, and the falling rain was driven into the face of a horseman, who was riding along a country road in New York State, with a force that stung.

The horseman drew his heavy cloak more closely about him, bent his head and rode on through the night and the storm.

Suddenly a ruder gust of wind caused one end of his cloak to blow loose from his grasp, and in gathering it about him again he raised his head and an exclamation broke from his lips, while he dashed spurs to his horse, and rode forward like the wind.

ALMONT MORENCY ENTERTAINING HIS GUEST.

Before him, upon the slope of a hill, he beheld a large structure, and from the lower windows there were bursting red flames that now illumined the night.

Into a massive gateway he turned, for the gate was open, and like the very wind he rode toward the burning building, while his deep voice arose above the tempest in the warning cry:

"Fire! fire! fire!"

His voice, ringing out like a trumpet, and the light of the flames, now aroused some of the sleeping inmates, and wild cries of alarm were heard upon every side.

Hastily leaping from the saddle, he hitched his horse, threw off his cloak and dashed into the burning building, crushing open the doors with his weight.

"Fire! fire! fire! Rouse yourselves! the house is on fire!"

Loud rung his voice through the halls and rooms, and then he began to act with reckless courage, and yet with perfect presence of mind.

The structure was the young ladies' fashionable boarding-school of Madam Doremus, and, fortunately, the commencement exercises had just closed that day and three-fourths of the pupils had left for their homes.

But quite a number of the students were yet remaining, and teachers and servants also, which the coming on of the storm had prevented from leaving.

These were aroused, and a thrilling scene followed.

Having given the alarm, the horseman endeavored to restore order out of chaos, and his calm voice did a world of good in quieting those who had been so startlingly called from their beds.

"Where is Celeste Vivian?" suddenly cried a young girl, in wild alarm.

"She went to the room of Lulu Vance, to save her!" came the reply.

"My God! she will perish, for, see! that wing is on fire!" cried one of the lady teachers.

"Where is the room?" came in the calm voice of the stranger.

"Down that corridor—it is the last room! but it is too late! too late!"

The words did not cause the horseman to shrink, but, seizing a blanket from one of the girls, he dashed down the corridor and disappeared in the smoke.

The occupants were gathered in a group in the main hallway, for that end of the building was not in flames, the wind blowing from that direction.

Out of the half-hundred souls in the building all but two were believed to be safe.

One of these two was Celeste Vivian, the most beautiful girl in the school, and Lulu Vance, a young girl who had been her rival in many ways since the two had entered the institution together.

Breathlessly all awaited the coming of the brave stranger, if come back he could from the dread ordeal he had dared to face.

All that could be saved from the burning wing had been gotten out, and the men about the place with the few from neighboring farms who had come to the rescue had checked the advance of the flames toward the other half of the building.

A silent, appalled group they stood, all feeling that they owed their lives to the timely warning given them by the unknown horseman, and now depending upon him for the rescue of the two absent girls.

Could it be that he had succumbed to the flames or the smoke?

The seconds dragged away like minutes, but, at last, out of the dense smoke, tottered a form enwrapped in a blanket.

Toward the group in the rotunda he came a few paces, then he bent over and placed a form upon the floor.

"She has fainted; see to her."

He spoke hoarsely, and again throwing the blanket about him he dashed back into the black smoke.

Willing ones ran forward, raised the form in their arms, bearing her to the rotunda.

"It is Lulu Vance!"

"Is she dead?"

"Has Celeste perished?"

Such were the cries that arose, as they raised the form of Miss Vance, which was enveloped in a waterproof, and bore it out into the air, upon a piazza.

Then all others watched that corridor, through which now and then, shooting like forked lightning through the dense, inky smoke, could be seen red flames.

"There!"

The one word was fairly shrieked from a man's lips.

Then a wild shout burst forth in chorus as the form of the daring rescuer was seen staggering out of the fiery furnace, as it were.

The blanket about him was on fire, but it was thrown aside, and on the man came, at a run, and in his arms was a form.

"He has saved her!" and with the words another wild cry of joy went up.

Up to the crowd he tottered, rather than

walked, and into the arms of Madam Doremus he gave the rescued girl.

"She is not dead?" gasped the madam, in a tone of horror.

"No, I am all right," was the faint reply; "that noble man has saved me."

All eyes turned upon the rescuer. He could not speak, and was panting for breath.

His face was scorched, his hands blistered, his hair singed, but they beheld a superb specimen of manhood, one upon whose form and face was indelibly stamped the brand of nature's nobleman.

"You are suffering, sir; you are—"

"Merely worn-out, madam, for the struggle was a hard one. Do not mind me," and his voice was hardly above a whisper as he spoke to Madam Doremus.

Then he turned away and went out upon the piazza.

The winds had lulled, and the rain descended in torrents, so that the rest of the building was saved, and, as the joyous cries announced this, Celeste Vivian said:

"Madam Doremus, do not care for me, for see, I am quite well, so look to that man, for he is the sufferer. He came through a burning room to save me."

"I will go at once to him, and send for the doctor to see to him," replied the kind-hearted woman, and having seen that Lulu Vance was also herself once more, she went in search of the stranger.

But he was nowhere to be found, and a search revealed that he had been seen to mount his horse and ride away in the storm.

Who he was no one could tell.

CHAPTER II.

MORENCY MANOR.

UPON the shores of Long Island Sound, where a large cove formed a fine harborage for small vessels, there stands to-day an old stone mansion large enough to be an inn.

It is two stories high, with an attic, and huge dormer windows look out from the roof, while there are two wings on either side and an extension in front and rear, the latter double the length of the former, which gave it the shape of a Greek cross.

The grounds in front slope gently to the shore of the cove, distant a hundred yards. Upon the right is a large flower-garden, with old-fashioned hedges and arbors, and on the left a park of magnificent trees.

In the rear lies a vegetable-garden, with out-buildings beyond it.

To-day the old house is slowly crumbling to decay, its out-buildings in ruins, and its grounds and gardens overgrown with weeds—a sad picture of neglect.

It is still surrounded by its thousand acres, for the owner will neither occupy it, nor sell or rent it, and, in fact, did he offer to do the latter he would find no occupant, as its history is a sad and weird one, and folks whose homes are on either side along the Sound, half a mile distant, assert that, if ever a house was haunted, it is Morency Manor.

At the time of which I write, back among the "Fifties," Morency Manor was the home of Almont Morency, a young man of twenty-eight, to whom his father had left the home and certain other properties as his inheritance.

Properly speaking, there was another heir, or had been—a brother of Almont Morency, but he had left home when a mere youth, under a cloud, as it were, and his stern old father, an army officer, had disowned him utterly.

"Will you leave nothing to Egbert, father?" had asked Almont, as he stood by the bedside of his dying parent.

"Hail is he alive?"

"I know not, sir."

"You have not heard of him?"

"Not a word, sir, since, ten years ago, he left home."

"Since I drove him from my door, you mean, boy, and, should he ever return, never let him cross the threshold he has dishonored."

"Father!"

"I mean it, Almont—from my soul I mean it, and not a dollar of mine shall he ever get, while you should give him up to the officers of the law for his crime, should he return here. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, father."

And in this spirit did old Colonel Egbert Morency die, and Almont became sole heir to the Morency estate.

There were some who said that the old officer was a very rich man, and so had left a large fortune, while others hinted of mortgages and debts enough to leave but little to the heir, should these be paid off.

It looked however as though the fortune was a large one, as Almont, some months after the death of his father, had many improvements made in the old home, which, from cellar to garret, was overhauled, modernized, and put in condition bordering almost upon the palatial.

The out-houses, the fences and the grounds were also put in the best of order, and the country folk thereabout were wont to say that Morency Manor was fit to be the abode of a lord.

The house was also handsomely furnished, a number of servants were engaged, the stables were filled with the finest horses, a yacht lay at anchor in the harbor, and, in fact, Almont Morency determined to live a life of luxury and pleasure with the fortune left him.

A man of superb physique, he also possessed a handsome face, strangely winning in expression, though withal resolute and daring.

His step showed that he was proud of his lineage, and yet he ever spoke with kind tone to the most humble.

He had received a cadetship to West Point when in his eighteenth year, up to which time he had passed several years with his father, who had been stationed at forts on the border of Texas and the Northwest.

Graduating with honor at West Point, he gave up the life of a soldier to return home and remain with his father, who had resigned from the army, and, though at times a little wild and extravagant, he had proven a devoted son, remaining by the old colonel until death forever parted them.

In the family burying-ground on the estate Colonel Morency had been laid to rest, and over his ashes the dutiful son had reared a broken column, with cannon at the base, and a sword, fatigue-cap and spurs artistically carved beneath the inscription.

A year or more passed, and the handsome young master of Morency Manor was greatly sought after by designing mammas, and in fact there was many a young girl who would have been glad to become mistress of his handsome home.

Sailing in his pretty yacht, *Ideal*, to New York, he was often wont to remain away for weeks, and yet, though he was a member of several fashionable city clubs, he seldom brought home with him a guest, though the manor could readily have accommodated over a score, and had room to spare.

Some said that it was because he was mourning still for his father's death, while a few alleged as a reason that he was not of a sociable nature.

One afternoon Almont Morency was returning home from a hunt, his gun on his shoulder, a dog at his heels, when suddenly he stopped as his eyes fell upon a stranger standing gazing at the marble monument over Colonel Morency's grave, for his path led by the burial-place.

The stranger's horse was hitched near, and he turned, upon hearing the approach of Almont, and raising his hat, politely said:

"I beg pardon, sir, but are you the master of yonder handsome mansion?"

"I am, sir; my name is Morency."

"I am a traveler, sir, and was going to crave your hospitality for the night, but halted here to look at this splendid monument, which, I take it, is to your father?"

"Yes, sir; but, will you go on with me to the mansion, for you are welcome?"

"Thank you, yes—but, let me introduce myself as Duncan Moore."

Almont Morency bowed in silence, and led the way on to the mansion, where the stranger's horse was taken by a servant, and himself made most comfortable in a room that overlooked the Sound.

CHAPTER III.

A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY.

ALMONT MORENCY had aristocratic tastes; he dined late, even when alone, and so the stranger sat down with him to a most tempting dinner.

The viands were of the best, the wines old and the service excellent, while the host and guest both seemed anxious to please.

"I never saw the master so pleasant for a long time, and I declare the visitor looks like him enough to be his brother," said Corks, the butler, to Whip, the coachman, as the two sat together at dinner, enjoying the wine which the former had managed to save from each bottle.

"Yes; Brush, who took his horse, said as how they favored each other. Maybe it's poor Master Egbert as went away so mysterious when he were a mere boy," suggested Whip, who, with Corks, had been a servant in the Morency family for many years.

After dinner, Almont led the way to the library, and there coffee and cigars, with a "pony" of cognac, were served, and the two, so lately met, seemed to enjoy the society of each other immensely.

Mr. Duncan Moore seemed to have traveled extensively, and yet he never spoke of himself, did not say where he was born, nor of what country he was a native.

He had a fund of anecdote, talked well, and was most entertaining, in fact, and Almont, in his own mind, voted him a most clever fellow and boon companion.

As the hour grew late, Mr. Moore suddenly turned toward his host and said:

"Do not think me inquisitive, Mr. Morency, if I ask you if you are married?"

"No, I am not; I keep bachelor's hall here."

"Strange that it should be so."

"No, for I never met but one woman I thought I would like to make my wife."

"And she is beyond your reach?"

"No; that is, I have never asked her, and, in fact, do not really know."

"Strange again; but you are the only heir to your late father's fortune?"

Almont started, and turned a quick glance upon his guest, while he said:

"The only heir, yes, unless you know of another."

"Could there be another?"

"I do not know your motive, Mr. Moore, for entering into my private matters; but I will frankly say that I had a brother, whether now dead or alive I do not know. He left home when he was but fifteen years of age, and, for reasons best known to himself, my father disinherited him, leaving me his fortune; but, did I know of my brother being alive, and were he in want, I would gladly aid him."

"This does you credit, Mr. Morency; but do you think you would know your brother, did you see him?"

Again Almont Morency started and gazed fixedly into the face of the man before him.

There was something about his guest that had puzzled him all the evening, the feeling that he had somewhere met him before.

Now, he said, as a thought dawned upon him, and he spoke in a low, earnest tone:

"Are you, can it be that you are my brother Egbert?"

The guest arose and extended his hand, while he said, in a voice full of emotion:

"Forgive me, Almont, for practicing deceit upon you; but I wished to see you first without being known, and I have done so, and I find you as true as steel."

Both men seemed deeply moved, and for awhile neither spoke, but then they conversed together in an earnest way until the clock in the hall chimed forth midnight.

"Come, let us retire, and to-morrow we will talk over matters, Egbert," said Almont, cheerily, and he led the way to the room which had been assigned to his guest.

An hour after the house was in deep repose, and no sound broke the stillness of the night save the fall of the waves upon the sandy beach.

Breakfast had been ordered for nine, so Corks was not one to bestir himself a minute sooner than was necessary, and it was nearly eight o'clock before he entered the library to air the room and put things to rights.

Hardly had he crossed the threshold before he stopped short, as though he had run against a wall, and a cry broke from his lips.

"Lord ha' mercy! but the place has been robbed!"

With a quickness he seldom exhibited, he made his way to his master's room and aroused him by a loud knock upon the door.

"Come in, and what is all this row about?" cried Almont Morency, sternly.

"Oh, Master Almont, the house has been robbed!"

And Corks drew aside the heavy curtain and let the light come into the darkened room.

"Robbed!"

And Almont Morency turned deadly pale.

"Yes, sir; your desk-safe in the library has been broken open, and things lie scattered about the floor."

Almont passed his hand across his brow several times and then said, quickly:

"Have you seen my—guest this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Go and awaken him while I dress."

Corks was gone but a few minutes, and then came back at a run, his fat face now livid as he cried:

"He's dead, sir."

"Dead!"

"Yes, sir; kilt entirely, murdered, assassinated! Oh, my! oh, my!"

Half-dressed as he was, Almont Morency went to the wing overlooking the Sound.

There, in the pleasant room assigned the guest, was the dead form of the one he had parted with at midnight!

Upon his forehead was a deep cut, and beneath it the bone was crushed, showing that death had been instantaneous.

The appearance of the corpse indicated that he had gotten out of bed and been felled by the blow of an assassin.

His watch and pocket-book were gone, and his pockets had been rifled of everything they had contained.

Against the window without leant a ladder, and that showed how the murderer or murderers had entered the mansion.

To the library they had then gone, and the desk-safe where Almont Morency kept his important papers, money and valuables had been rifled.

The papers were scattered about, but the money and valuables had been taken.

From the side-board in the dining-room a quantity of massive silver plate had also been taken, so that the loss to the young master of Morency Manor was great; but the dead form in the guest's chamber was what gave the heaviest blow to him, for he paced to and fro, muttering to himself:

"Poor, poor fellow! Dare I tell who he was? Dare I let it be known that he was my brother?"

"No, no, that secret I will keep, for why should it be known?"

A physician, though none was needed, was sent for; a coroner and the county officers, to whom Almont Morency told his story, how he had met the horseman, and he had asked the hospitalities of the mansion, and the two had set up until midnight talking together.

Who he was he did not tell, and, as no papers were found upon his person, he was put down by the name he had given—that of Duncan Moore.

Almont Morency had the unfortunate man buried, gave to the city newspapers an account of his death and a description of him, and was thus said to have done his duty by the dead stranger.

But weeks went by and no trace of the midnight marauders could be found. It was believed that they must have been a lawless band that at times committed crimes on the Sound and its shores.

Thus the midnight mystery remained unsolved.

CHAPTER IV.

FAIR RIVALS.

CELESTE VIVIAN was not only beautiful, but an heiress, for, when left an orphan at fourteen, she was also made heir to the large fortune of her father.

She was an only child, and had no kindred that she knew of in the United States.

Her father was the brother of an English nobleman, and had come to America to make his fortune. In this he had been successful, and had married a lovely girl, the daughter of an army officer, who was living with her father at a frontier fort.

Celeste was their only child, and if her mother had any near relatives, she had no desire to form their acquaintance, while, as for her father's kindred in England, as he had been willing to give them up, she had no desire to hunt them out.

Her guardian was an attorney, and to his home she had gone after the death of her father, and from there to boarding-school.

Her vacations she spent with her guardian's family at their home, or at the seaside with them, and one year accompanying them to Europe.

The day before the fire at Madam Doremus's academy, Celeste Vivian had finished her education, graduating with the highest honors in her class.

She was a finished musician, possessed a superb voice, that was the envy of her schoolmates, and her beauty of face and form made her most attractive, while her wealth did not in the least detract from her fascinations.

Her father had so willed that upon her eighteenth birthday she was to come in possession of her fortune, to manage it according to her own views, certainly a great trust to place in the hands of a young girl; but then, her father had realized, young as she was, that Celeste was no ordinary person.

A few weeks before the ending of her school-days, Celeste had reached her eighteenth birthday, and her guardian had visited her at Madam Doremus's, and placed in her hands the account of his stewardship.

"You are a very rich young lady, Celeste, worth almost a million, and every investment you hold is a safe and paying one, so that you will have an income of fifty thousand a year."

"As you desired me to do, I have had your old home on the Hudson fitted up and refurnished for you, according to your own plans and ideas, and you will find it completely ready for your reception, with servants, horses and all you may need. The housekeeper I engaged is a lady, one who can also be a companion and chaperon for you; but remember, our house is your home, whenever you care to make it so, and I shall still retain my place as your friend, attorney and adviser."

So had said the good-hearted guardian, Roland Rollins, to whom, and his family, Celeste was deeply attached.

Generous to a fault, Celeste had not allowed one of her class to depart without a souvenir of her, and her teachers were also most kindly remembered, while all with whom she had been most friendly had received a *carte blanche* invitation to visit "The Pines," as her very comfortable home on the Hudson River was called.

Though a favorite with all, from Madam Doremus down to the youngest scholar, this rule had an exception in part, for Celeste Vivian had a rival.

That rival was Lulu Vance, the daughter of a wealthy New York merchant, and certainly a most beautiful and charming girl, though she was a trifle too haughty.

She was older than Celeste by a year, and had enjoyed the pleasure of being called the "Belle of the Academy," until the coming of Celeste to the school, after her return from Europe, in her sixteenth year.

Then the scholars became divided in their opinion as to which was the most lovely in face and form—Celeste, or Lulu Vance.

Lulu also had held the palm as the possessor of the finest voice, and yet Celeste won it from her very quickly, and also had the advantage of playing exquisitely upon the piano, as well as upon the harp and violin.

In studies they held about even, with the odds in favor of Celeste, and in horsemanship, certainly two more daring riders were hard to find, for Madam Doremus allowed her scholars to keep their own horses, if they so wished, and to ride daily under escort of a solemn tutor, who constantly vowed that the two girls would get their necks broken yet by their recklessness.

Perhaps it was because Lulu Vance, having excelled in everything for a year or more, had now found a rival who, in several ways, was her superior, and in all others her equal, that she showed pique toward Celeste.

Certainly she had shown ill-humor toward her on several occasions, though the lovely nature of Celeste had never allowed her to show it, and at last she simply treated Lulu with cool indifference.

Not a smile of triumph flitted over her face when she was chosen the Poetess of her class, nor again when she was announced as Number One in all her studies, Music, Drawing and Deportment, while Lulu Vance was Number Two.

The latter turned very pale, and her eyes burned with anger as she cast a glance at her successful rival, while her brow clouded when she noted that the applause given Celeste seemed more sincere and prolonged than what she had received.

"Come, Lulu, our school-days are ended, and our paths in life divide."

"Let us part in friendship," said Celeste, going up to her fair rival, after the exercises were over.

Lulu flashed an angry look into the eyes of Celeste, her lip curled, and she turned and walked away without a word, while a score of voices cried out:

"For shame, Lulu!"

The beautiful face of Celeste colored for an instant, but she smiled, and turned to bid some of her schoolmates farewell.

Six hours after she was aroused from sleep by the loud cry:

"Fire! fire!"

She sprang from her bed, glanced out of the window into the darkness, and beheld a glare of light, while a horseman was dashing up to the building, his deep voice sounding the alarm.

With great presence of mind she dressed, and with wonderful rapidity gathered together a few treasures she held most dear, and in a few minutes was rushing from room to room arousing the sleepers.

Fortunately a large majority of the scholars, some of the teachers and a few servants had left the day before, or the loss of life would have been great. As it was, the bold horseman's coming alone saved many.

"Where is Lulu Vance?" suddenly cried Celeste, as with a group of frightened girls and teachers, she stood in the main hall of the building.

Her words fell like a pall upon all present, for no one had seen her.

Her room was at the end of the long corridor in one wing, and it was already in flames.

"Keep this for me!" and handing her bundle of treasures to a teacher, Celeste Vivian threw her shawl over her head and dashed down the long hall to the rescue of her rival.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE MOMENT OF DESPAIR.

WORN out by her hard study, angry at not having stood at the head, and in generally an ill-humor, Lulu Vance had retired to her room early and wept herself to sleep.

Perhaps it was because she was in such a mood that she failed to observe that nearly every girl who had roomed in the wing of the building with her had left that day, and she was comparatively alone.

With her manifold duties Madam Doremus had also left this fact unobserved by her usually keen eyes, and so Lulu Vance slept soundly while the flames were spreading through that part of the building.

The curtains were drawn close, and the brightness did not reach her, while the crackling of burning timber and the shouts of her schoolmates, along with the roar of the storm, failed to arouse her.

Suddenly she felt a hand upon her arm, and a quiet voice said:

"Come, Lulu, get up and dress, for the house has caught on fire."

She sat bolt upright in bed, glared about her, and beheld at her bedside Celeste Vivian.

The room was now brilliantly lighted, and to her ears came a great roar and the red flames without met her eyes.

"Oh, Celeste, save me!" she cried, and she sprang from the bed.

"Quick, Lulu, put on what clothes you can; here are your shoes, and I will gather what things together you may wish to save."

The calmness of Celeste Vance had its effect upon Lulu and she began to dress, but with trembling hands.

It was a hasty toilet she made, and meanwhile

Celeste had been gathering up precious little valuables and making them into a bundle, for she knew there were things that her rival did not wish to lose.

"Are you ready, Lulu?"

"Yes."

And the word came in a whisper.

"Then come; wrap this blanket about you and cling close to me. I will carry the bundle."

As she spoke, Celeste opened the door and a great volume of smoke rushed in with a fiery serpent of flame.

Back she shrunk before that fearful ordeal, while Lulu, with a wild shriek, sunk fainting upon the floor.

For an instant Celeste was appalled. She saw that the flames in that part of the building had gained great headway since her coming.

The windows she knew overlooked the court, with stone pavement, forty feet below, and there was no hope in that direction.

Were she to open a window there would be a draft, and the room would be filled with smoke and flame.

"I must carry her," she said, bravely, and, enveloping Lulu in a blanket, and wrapping her heavy shawl about her own form, she bent over and raised her in her arms, the terror of the situation giving her the strength of a man.

Lulu was still unconscious, so was a dead weight, and it was no easy task to open the door, hampered as she was.

As Celeste opened the door, with her unconscious rival in her arms, the smoke and flames from the corridor again rolled over her head into the room, and she staggered back with a cry of horror.

"I will not desert her, foe of mine though she be. I will save her, or perish with her!" cried Celeste, with a courage no man could surpass and few equal.

Then on she started, staggering under her heavy weight, half-blinded and smothered by smoke, and with the heat of the flames becoming unbearable.

"Oh, God, have mercy!"

With this pitiful cry Celeste sunk down upon her knees, still clasping the form of her rival, just as a tall form sprang to her side and cried:

"I will save you both!"

The man was the strange horseman.

He grasped the form of the unconscious Lulu in his arms, while he cried to Celeste:

"Back into the room and await my return!"

But she could not move, and still remained upon her knees.

Instantly he laid down the form he held, and almost dragging Celeste back into the room closed the door, and in another second was bounding along the corridor with the unconscious Lulu in his arms.

Another minute, but it seemed ages to Celeste, and the door burst open, and the stranger was before her.

She still remained upon her knees, her hands clasped, her eyes raised in prayer, as the daring unknown dashed into the room to her rescue.

"Come!"

It was all he said, and throwing a blanket over her he raised her in his arms and bounded out into the flaming corridor.

Once he half fell, again he staggered, then rested heavily against the wall; but, reviving, again he rushed on, and the next instant had placed the beautiful girl into the outstretched arms of her friends, while he shrunk back, unable to speak, panting, suffering, and seemingly wholly unmindful of the wild cheer that rung from every lip at his bold rescue in the face of a most fearful death.

Shrinking further and further back, the unknown man descended the stairs, and seeing that the drenching rain and lulling wind were putting out the fire, he faced the dread storm, picked up his heavy cloak from where he had thrown it, and, going to his patiently-waiting horse, mounted and rode away.

In the excitement and confusion his departure was unnoticed, and when his absence was discovered he was riding at a rapid gallop along the highway leading to the nearest town.

Arriving there he stopped at a hotel, sent for a physician, and then took an early train to the city.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RECOGNITION.

THE morning at last dawned, to find one-half of the handsome academy building in ruins.

And then, too, among its ashes were two human forms. A servant-girl and an errand-boy had perished in the flames, for, if awakened, they had become bewildered and could not save themselves from death.

Madam Doremus was calm and collected, and congratulated herself upon being amply insured, and also that the event had come upon her at the end of the term, and when so few were in the building.

The storm had cleared away, the sun arose brightly, and the birds sung merrily in the trees: but there was sadness in the hearts of those who had so nearly lost their lives.

Lulu Vance was asleep, the doctor having given her a soothing powder, and she, with

others of her companions, had taken refuge in the unharmed wing of the building.

Celeste Vivian, a heroine as she had proven herself, was also sleeping, though she had declined the doctor's medicine.

Every attempt to find out who the gallant unknown was or whither he had gone was unavailing.

All were anxious to know, as, but for his warning, who could tell how many would have escaped a fearful death, and certainly many would have been the victims of the merciless flames.

At last Celeste Vivian awoke, and standing near her was Lulu Vance.

The face of the latter was deathly pale, but it flushed as she advanced and said:

"Celeste, forgive me for my actions in the past, and let me tell you that I know full well that, but for you, I would have lost my life."

"Ah, no, Lulu, it was that daring stranger who saved your life, as he did mine. I made the effort to bring you out, but was overcome, and we would both have perished but for him."

"Where is he?"

No one could answer more than that he had left soon after the rescue, going whither not a soul knew.

As Madam Doremus seemed anxious to get the rest of the scholars away as soon as possible, carriages and wagons were ordered, and all set out for the nearest station to catch the train, and this was at the town where the stranger had gone.

Having to remain at the hotel several hours, as the train was delayed, a professor who had charge of the bevy of school-girls, at the request of Celeste Vivian, made inquiries regarding the unknown horseman.

Yes; the landlord had seen such a person, for he had arrived before daylight.

"Is he now here?"

"No; he left by the early train for the city."

"What was his name?"

This the landlord could not tell, for he had not registered, and had paid for his room and breakfast.

"Was not his horse there to be called for?"

He had left his horse there, saying that a man would come on the train during the day and take him back to where he had hired him, and the party had arrived on the very train that the gentleman had taken to New York.

"Could we see that man?" asked the professor, and Celeste, Lulu and the other girls all awaited anxiously while the landlord went in search of him.

He soon returned, accompanied by a young man who looked like a jockey.

"Who is the gentleman, my man, whose horse you are to carry back with you?" asked the professor.

"I don't know, sir, for he came to the stable in the town, hired the horse to ride across the country, and gave me a tenner to take the train to this place and ride the animal back home."

"You have no idea how we can find out who he is?"

"No, sir; but he said he was a stranger in these parts, and offered to give the boss the price of the horse if he was afraid to trust him; but the boss said as how he looked honest, and let him have him."

This was all the stableman could tell, when the landlord suggested that the doctor might know.

"What doctor?" asked the professor, eagerly.

"Doctor Lowndes, who dressed his burns for him, sir."

"Then he was seriously hurt?"

"He seemed to suffer, sir."

The doctor was accordingly sent for, and, as his office was near, he soon appeared.

"I wish, doctor, you would tell us what you know about the gentleman who was your patient last night. The truth is, he saved the lives of nearly all in the Doremus Academy last night, and then slipped off in the excitement that was upon us all, without being known."

"Just like him, sir, from what I saw of him; but I can tell you nothing about him more than that he was a gentleman, plucky, too, for he did not wince under the pain he suffered, and left on the early train."

"Was he seriously hurt, sir?" asked Celeste.

"No, miss, though his burns were painful."

"And you do not know his name?" asked Lulu Vance.

"I do not, miss, though I gave him a hint I would like to know it. He simply wished me to do the best I could for him, and said that he had been burned in trying to put out a fire which he had discovered breaking out as he came along the highway."

"I set him down as a gentleman, and a most modest one indeed, while he showed pluck in not caring for the pain I know he suffered."

Thus was all trace of the unknown lost, and soon after the girls departed on the train for their respective homes.

To The Pines went Celeste Vivian. She had received promises from various of her school-mates to come and visit her at her home some time in the near future.

Arriving at her home, Celeste was enraptured with it and felt proud at being its mistress.

She found the lady there who was to be her companion and housekeeper, and after a few moments' conversation with her, said, to herself:

"I will like her."

And she did, for Mrs. Evans was no ordinary personage, and she at once took a great fancy to the fair young mistress of The Pines, for she was in fear and trembling, dreading that she would find her a very different person from what she now discovered her to be.

Some weeks after her return home Celeste decided to go to the city to make certain needed purchases for the beautifying of the house, and Mrs. Evans accompanied her.

It was about the close of the season, for the summer was at hand, and Celeste determined to go to the theater to witness the last night's performance of a popular star, and so sent for a box.

Her guardian accompanied Mrs. Evans and herself, and they had hardly been seated in their box when several gentlemen opposite were at once attracted by the beauty of the young heiress.

"I say, Benson, who is that lovely girl in the opposite box?" asked a gentleman, of his companion, as he leveled his glass at Celeste.

"Ah! that is old Lawyer Rollins's ward, and she is worth a clean million in her own right. I saw him shopping with her yesterday, and asked him last night who she was. Is she not beautiful?"

"Perfectly so."

As the speaker uttered the words, he met the eyes of Celeste Vivian fixed upon him, and saw her start suddenly and then turn quickly to her guardian.

"She has just graduated, Rollins says, and lives at her home on the Hudson, with an elderly lady companion, for she has no near kindred; and, by the way, she was a pupil at the Doremus Academy when it burned, and so many lives were saved by the gallant, unknown horseman, as we saw by the papers, and whose description just suits you, Morency."

"He saved her life at the risk of his own, and yet no one knows who he is, unless it is yourself, and too modest to make the fact known."

"I also read the description, and it was you exactly, Morency," said the third occupant of the box.

"See, she is urging her guardian to some step—yes, and he is coming here, I'll wager high on it."

"You are known, Morency, so can no longer try to play the gallant unknown," and as the speaker uttered the words Mr. Rollins left the box and came around the theater to that occupied by the three gentlemen, while Celeste eagerly watched him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECOND RECOGNITION.

WHEN Almont Morency went up to the city, a week before the scene at the theater, he was joked by the members of his club at not making himself known as the unknown hero of the Doremus Academy fire.

"Why, man, have you not read the many articles upon your courage, and how all the young ladies from the academy are pining to meet you, and present you with a fitting memorial of the occasion?" asked a young man.

"Nonsense! why should they suspect me of being this person who wishes to keep his identity unknown?" asked Almont Morency.

"Simply because the description tallies with you exactly—tall, with broad shoulders and a superb form, a handsome face, bronzed by exposure, a long, brown mustache, dark waving hair worn rather long, and with the initial 'M' on a silk handkerchief which he dropped from about his neck."

"I tell you, Morency, the club all decide that you were the man, and we are glad of it; but, for the sake of us all, come out and admit the truth, and then you can marry one of the beautiful heiresses whose lives you have saved."

"Don't be foolish, Gascoigne," returned Morency, and he walked away from the group, his annoyed manner the more convincing all that he was indeed the gallant unknown, for it was known that he had been up in the country hunting not far from Doremus Academy at the time of the fire.

The next time the affair was spoken of was at the theater, when, with two friends, Almont Morency had taken a box there.

In glancing about the theater, before the rise of the curtain, the eyes of Celeste had suddenly fallen upon the face of the master of Morency Manor.

She had started and at once raised her glass.

The glare of the footlights fell upon his face, and she was sure there could be no doubt, for he appeared just as he had that night in the full glare of the flames of the burning building.

She saw the same handsome features, the long mustache, waving hair and broad shoulders, and then her eyes met his.

"Mr. Rollins, do you know that gentleman in the box opposite?" she asked her guardian, eagerly.

"Not personally, Celeste, if you mean

Morency, the one on the right; but I have seen him often."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Almont Morency, and he is a very wealthy country gentleman, who dwells at his home on Long Island."

"I have often seen him, and he is said to be a splendid fellow, though preferring a quiet life at his home to living in the city."

"Mr. Rollins, that man is the gallant Unknown," said Celeste, impressively.

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"The man who saved your life at the academy?"

"Yes, and the lives of half a hundred more."

"But he lives on Long Island."

"He was at the academy on that awful night, for I cannot be mistaken, sir."

"You had a good view of him, then?"

"As I have now, and you would oblige me if you will go and ask him if I am mistaken, and if not, please bring him to our box that I may thank him."

"I will do so, for I know Ludlow in the box with him," and Mr. Rollins went upon his errand.

As he entered the box, Lucas Ludlow arose and greeted him, at once presenting his friends, and adding:

"We told Morency, Mr. Rollins, that your ward was the lady whose life he had saved at the Doremus Academy fire, but his modesty causes him to deny the impeachment."

"It is because Miss Vivian recognized you, Mr. Morency, that I have come, to ask you to accompany me to her box, that she may thank you for your noble service on that awful night."

Just then the curtain rose, and Almont Morency said:

"I have but a few moments to remain at the theater, Mr. Rollins; but if you will let me know where I can call upon Miss Vivian, it will give me pleasure to do so."

"She is at the New York Hotel, sir, and will be at home to-morrow afternoon; but I regret that you cannot come now."

Mr. Rollins saw that Morency preferred not to do so, and so returned to his box and made his report.

Celeste's face flushed slightly, but she said:

"It is better so, for his modesty seems to cause him to keep in the background; but I knew that I was right."

At the end of the first act they saw Morency rise and leave the box, after an adieu to his two companions, who certainly were surprised at his wishing to remain unknown in the affair of the academy fire.

"He's a queer fellow, is Morency, and as modest as a school-girl. Why, I would be only too glad to be the hero that he is," said Lucas Ludlow to his friend Bert Primon, after Morency had departed.

"Well, he is very rich, very handsome, and cares nothing for the society of ladies, wherein he is not like ourselves, Ludlow, comparatively poor, passably good-looking and fond of the fair sex, while we would jump at the chance of becoming a hero and marrying an heiress," answered Bert Primon.

"Bah! you always have such a matter-of-fact way of speaking, Primon; but I will wager if Morency meets yonder beautiful girl he falls in love with her."

"Egad, I am half in love with her myself already, and must ask Rollins to introduce me."

"And don't forget me, for we'll start in the race to win together, for, upon my soul she is a beauty, and—how much did you say she had in the way of filthy lucre?"

"A clean million, I am told."

"It's worth a struggle for at least," and, as Celeste no longer looked toward their box, the two fashionable clubmen turned their attention to the play as the curtain went up upon the second act.

In the mean time Morency left the theater, not because he had an engagement, but to escape from meeting Celeste before his two friends.

Remembering that he owed a visit to a friend in an uptown hotel, he sprang into a cab and driving there sent up his card.

As he entered the parlor he heard a slight exclamation, and saw a lady and gentleman waiting there.

The lady it was who had uttered the exclamation, and she at once advanced toward him.

"Pardon me, sir, but I am Miss Lulu Vance, whose life you saved at the burning of the Doremus Academy, and I have long wished to thank you, but never could see or hear of you, so you will excuse my seeming boldness in speaking now to you?"

Lulu Vance looked very beautiful, and Almont Morency knew just who she was, for he had seen her before, though they were unknown to each other.

He had also seen Celeste Vivian, a year before, when she was in the city, and had been struck with her beauty, though he had observed that then she had not noticed his existence.

Now, for the second time that night he was

brought face to face with another lovely girl whom he had saved at the fire at the Doremus Academy.

His face flushed and he seemed confused, but said:

"I am more than happy in again meeting Miss Vance, and that she has not suffered from the shock she had that night!"

"Thank you, no, I am quite myself again, and I owe my life to you, so can never forget that it is a debt beyond payment."

"May I not know your name, sir?"

"Almont Morency, Miss Vance," and he bowed.

"Oh, yes, an M was on the handkerchief which Madam Doremus found and you had been seen to wear about your neck."

"I know my father will be most happy to call, Mr. Morency, if you will tell me where you can be found?"

"I am at the Astor House, Miss Vance," and as his friends entered the parlor just then, he bowed to Lulu and turned away, while she returned to her companion, a young gentleman who had by no means seemed pleased at her having found the unknown hero of whom she had so often spoken.

Soon after those upon whom Lulu and her escort had called also entered the parlor, and Almont Morency, seeing that he was the object of their regard, soon arose and took his departure.

As he left the hotel, he muttered to himself:

"I am in for it, for that is the second recognition to-night."

"Shall I drift with the tide of Fate—or not?"

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE RISK OF LIFE.

THE morning following the meeting of Almont Morency with Lulu Vance, and seeing Celeste Vivian at the theater, Mr. Vance called at the Astor House to pay his respects to the one to whom his daughter owed her life, and who had so persistently kept himself unknown as the gallant hero.

To his regret he learned that Mr. Morency had been called away early that morning by a telegram, and when he would return no one at the hotel could give him any information.

The merchant, however, made inquiries about the brave rescuer, and was more than pleased at what he learned regarding him.

He discovered that he was wealthy, dwelt at a fine home on Long Island, was of aristocratic family, and had no entangling alliances that were known of.

"The very man for a son-in-law."

"Lulu must catch him," said the old merchant, with a fatherly eye to business in the way of looking out for the future of his daughter.

That afternoon, instead of a visit, as she had expected from Almont Morency, Celeste had a call from Mr. Rollins, who held a letter in his hand, and said:

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Celeste; but I received this note at my office this morning, and it seems that Mr. Morency has been called suddenly away."

Celeste hastily grasped the note and read:

"Thursday."

"MR. ROLLAND ROLLINS:—"

"MY DEAR SIR:—I regret exceedingly that an urgent matter calling me out of town for an indefinite period, will prevent my having the pleasure of keeping my engagement, to meet Miss Vivian this morning."

"At another time I hope to do so."

"With respect,"

"ALMONT MORENCY."

Celeste showed her disappointment, for, somehow, the daring stranger was winning upon her regard more and more, and she felt grieved that she could not at least meet him to show how deeply she felt all that he had risked for those wholly unknown to him.

The next day she returned to The Pines, and set about the work of beautifying her home, which was her greatest pleasure.

And The Pines was certainly a most lovely home, with its grand view of the Hudson, the inland scenery, its lawns, groves and flower-gardens, not to speak of the large, rambling old building which was furnished in the most luxurious style.

There were servants in plenty, riding and driving horses in the stable, with the finest roads to drive over, boats for rowing and sailing upon the river, and in fact all that heart could wish.

Perhaps it was the shock she had received on that awful night of fire, perhaps the warm weather, but, certain it was, Celeste did not feel at her best and her physician told her that a couple of months at the seaside would do her good.

"You have studied too hard the past year, and the sea air will build you up," he said.

So Celeste and Mrs. Evans, with a couple of servants started for a quiet resort on the coast of Massachusetts.

A small furnished cottage was secured, and Celeste settled herself down to a perfect rest, determined to shun the hotels and its gay society.

She was a fair swimmer, and the practice she

bad in the surf improved her immensely so that she was wont to venture far out among the breakers, to the alarm as well as admiration of those who crowded the beach.

Her beauty, and her jaunty costume made her the observed of all observers, and yet no one seemed to know exactly who she was.

One day the surf was very wild, after a storm, and few bathers ventured in.

Among these was a young girl who had also become famous for her swimming, and she at once went out quite a distance.

Just as she did so Celeste Vivian came down to the beach and plunged in.

She was not foolhardy, so would not venture far out, and was contenting herself near shore, when suddenly she heard a wild cry for help.

Strong men blanched at the cry, for not one dared go out to where the young girl before spoken of, was seen struggling hard for life.

But, hardly had the cry died away before Celeste was swimming with bold, rapid stroke to her aid.

"Cheer up, for help is near," cried Celeste, in a voice full of confidence.

And the young girl saw her as she mounted a huge wave and struggled on for life, where a moment before she would have given up.

All on shore breathlessly watched the two, the girl of thirteen and the maiden who was going to her rescue, while a few of the boldest swimmers among the men had started out to her aid when Celeste had set the daring example.

"Come quick! I am almost gone!" cried the young girl, struggling desperately.

And Celeste set her teeth hard and made superhuman efforts to reach her.

A moment more and she grasped the outstretched hand, and instantly the senses of the young girl left her and she became a dead weight in the arms of the daring maiden who had risked life to go to her rescue.

"Oh! what shall I do?" cried Celeste, as she saw the fearful danger of her situation, and she glanced eagerly shoreward, for she felt that her own strength was failing.

She now saw several men struggling toward them, but she felt sure they would come too late.

To release the insensible girl, and thus let her drown, would be to save herself, for she could yet swim ashore she thought, or at least to the men who were coming toward her, yet a long way off.

"It would be murder," she said, in a tone of horror, and she clung closely to the slender form.

Then a wild shout reached her ears; there came a fluttering sound, and a stern voice cried out behind:

"Have no fear, for help is near."

Almost her very words to the young girl rung in her ears.

Was it mockery?

No! for, turning her head, she beheld a yacht almost upon her and just going about, while a man who had sprung from her deck was within a few yards of her.

Then did Celeste realize why the young girl had fainted when she grasped her hand, for she felt as though she too would swoon away; but she controlled herself, and then came a strong arm about her waist and she was saved.

Then it was when she glanced into the face of her rescuer, that all grew black before her, and she swooned, for in that one look she had recognized that once again she owed her life to Almont Morency!

While wild shouts rung out from the shore, the two unconscious girls were drawn on board the yacht, and Almont Morency quickly followed.

"Put the craft into the harbor yonder, with all haste," he ordered, to his sailing-master, as he saw that the brave swimmers had put back, seeing that they were not needed, and then he set about restoring Celeste and the young girl whom she had saved from death.

CHAPTER IX.

ONCE MORE THEY MEET.

JUST as the pretty yacht Ideal glided alongside of the pier, a carriage dashed up and Mrs. Evans, with white, scared face sprang out.

She gave a cry of joy as she saw Celeste come out of the cabin unaided, a heavy cloak about her form, while Almont Morency followed, bearing the little girl in his strong arms, for, though she had returned to consciousness, she was yet too much unnerved to walk.

Another carriage just then arrived from the village, and in it was the father of the young girl, and he clasped her in his arms with a cry of joy, while he said:

"You owe your life, Mabel, to this brave lady and to that gentleman, for I saw it all," and he turned toward Celeste and Morency, who were with Mrs. Evans walking toward the carriage in which the latter had come to the landing.

"Oh, sir, you have done brave and noble work this day, and Heaven's blessing be ever upon you," said Mrs. Evans, earnestly.

"Mrs. Evans, this gentleman is Mr. Morency,"

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who once before saved my life, so you see he has placed another debt of gratitude upon me," Celeste said, and Mrs. Evans stood amazed at the discovery.

Grasping his hand she warmly pressed it, while tears streamed from her eyes, for she could not speak.

They had now reached the carriage, and Almont Morency, who was still in his wet clothes, said:

"I am on a short cruise, Miss Vivian; but upon my return shall run into port to inquire if you have suffered from your adventure to-day, if you will allow me to do so, for I suppose you are stopping here for awhile?"

"Yes, and shall be most glad to see you, Mr. Morency. We are at the Blue Cottage, and I am sorry you cannot remain and dine with us to-day."

"It will be impossible, thank you, for an imperative engagement calls me elsewhere; but I will return in a few days," and he raised his hat and returned to his yacht, while Celeste and Mrs. Evans drove rapidly homeward.

The other carriage had already driven on, the anxious father desirous of having a physician at once see his little daughter, and Celeste saw them alight at one of the large hotels on the beach.

Arriving at her little cottage, Mrs. Evans at once took her in hand, forced her to take a glass of wine and then lie down for awhile.

But, feeling able to get up in half an hour, Celeste dressed and went out upon the piazza.

There, far off in the waters, she saw the little yacht flying along toward Boston, and as she gazed at it she murmured:

"How strange it is that my whole heart has gone out to that man, and this is only our third meeting."

"But, what have not two of those three meetings been, for thrice he has saved me from death."

"How gentle he was, when I came to out of that deathlike faint, and found him bathing my face with cologne, while one of his crew was trying to revive that lovely child."

"I was rash to go to her aid, but then, I thank God I did so—oh! there she comes now, and her parents with her," and Celeste arose to welcome her visitors, who had come over to thank her for the life of their daughter.

"My wife and myself were coming, Miss Vivian, but Mabel would not hear to her not accompanying us, so here we are, your devoted friends, who never can, by words, thank you for what you have done for us," said Mr. Rufus Hathaway, who was a banker in Boston.

"I did only as my heart prompted me, sir, and the joy is mine that I was able to be of service; but both of us would have been drowned had it not been for the near presence of the yacht running close inshore, and which, strange to say, I had never noticed; but Mr. Morency had seen all and so headed for us and sprung overboard to the rescue just in time, so he is the one who deserves the credit."

"Mr. Morency, you say, is his name?" asked Mr. Hathaway.

"Yes, sir, his name is Almont Morency. He lives on Long Island, and I have had cause to remember him most kindly, as upon another occasion he saved my life," and Celeste told the story of the midnight fire at Doremus Academy, and all that Morency had done.

"He certainly is a most remarkably modest man, to keep himself in the background, after becoming the hero he did on that occasion; but I am glad to know that he is to return here that we may meet him, for I left him most abruptly to-day, worried as I was about Mabel."

"And, my dear Miss Vivian, I beg you will take this as a warning not to venture again out far from the shore, for I have noticed you swimming beyond the breakers with alarm, and I fear Mabel was trying to emulate you to-day when she went out as she did," said Mrs. Hathaway.

"No, mother, I was anxious to keep near Miss Vivian, fearing she would be swept out, and while floating was carried far out myself," said the pretty Mabel, and throwing her arms impulsively about the neck of her beautiful rescuer, she kissed her again and again.

"We must be friends now, Miss Vivian, and you surely will let me know when this modest hero returns, that I may call on him," said Mr. Hathaway when they took their leave.

Celeste promised to do so, and from that day she longingly looked out over the waters for the coming of Morency's yacht.

She had found herself quite a heroine, after her adventure, but she was of a retiring nature, and disliking to attract attention was wont to bathe with little Mabel at a time when the beach was not crowded.

Thus ten days passed away and one afternoon as she sat on the piazza reading, Celeste glanced up from her book and started to her feet, for there in full view was a yacht.

"But, is it the Ideal?" she said to herself, and she anxiously watched to see if the pretty craft stood on down the coast or ran into the little harbor a mile below the hotel.

"It is his yacht, for it is coming into the harbor," she cried grieffully to Mrs. Evans, and

then she suddenly checked herself as she remembered that she was betraying to another the secret of her own heart.

The sun had now set and night was coming on; but soon, through the darkness Celeste saw a form approaching, and a moment after she stepped forward and welcomed Almont Morency to her little home.

"I was sure I recognized your yacht, Mr. Morency, and as you had promised to come, I waited tea for you," she said, as she led the way into the house.

And thus those two met again, and neither of them could see what the future held for them for good or ill.

CHAPTER X.

THE SMUGGLER AND THE JEW.

In a dingy street, in one of the worst parts of the city of Boston, two men sat talking together in a room that was certainly most comfortable, when the surroundings were taken into consideration.

One of the two is a Jew, long-haired, long-bearded and unkempt, while he wears a handkerchief close about his neck as though cold, though it is in the month of July.

His companion is a man of large size, dressed in the garb of a sailor, and with a mass of black, curling hair falling about his shoulders.

At a glance one would notice something peculiar about his face; but only by the closest scrutiny could it be detected that he wore a flesh-like mask.

Between the two there seemed to exist that thorough sympathy which can be found among villains who had "pardoned" for mutual safety or gain.

With a slight accent only the Jew was saying, when they are introduced to the reader:

"I tell you, capt'ins, that I won't pay no more for the goots than five thousand dollars."

"But I must have ten, Bergheim, I say."

"Well, Capt'ins Ivan, you must go to somebody else to get it, for the goots are not worth so much."

"You know, Bergheim, that I am not acquainted with any one else, and besides, if the goods should not be worth more than the sum I ask they will fully bring that price, and our past transactions should cause you to be lenient now when I need your aid."

"Business, capt'ins, is business, and I must look to myself, for if you were not to bring more, then I lose my profits."

"But I will bring more."

"You don't know that, for life is very uncertain, and the Government officers keep close watch on you."

"I have dodged them before and can again, Bergheim."

"Maybe so; but, what for you need so much money?"

"I have debts to pay."

"You get large sums from me."

"Yes; and you make large sums out of the smuggled goods I bring you."

"I take much risk."

"Not as much as I do."

"Well, capt'ins, I will give you ten thousand on the goots—"

"I knew you would."

"You was too fast, capt'ins, for I say I give you the ten thousand dollars on the goots, though they are not worth but five, on conditions."

"What conditions?"

"That you show me your face."

The sailor started visibly and asked, in an angry tone:

"And what do you wish to see my face for?"

"Well, we was trade together for nearly two years, and you always come here at night and with that mask on, so I want to see your real face."

"That you will not do, for no man shall have that hold upon me who has known me to commit crime of seeing me as I really am."

"No, no; some day I hope to cast this life behind me and live a different existence, and I do not intend to live in constant dread of being recognized by those who have been my pals."

"Do not your crew know you, capt'ins?"

"Not one of them as I am, for I always am thus masked when on board my vessel."

"Well, if you wish the ten thousand for the goots, I give the money to you if you show me your face?"

"No, I'll not do it, so give me the five thousand and I'll take good care to find some one to trade with who can be more accommodating to me."

"No, no, don't do that, capt'ins, if you don't want Carl Bergheim to be your enemy, for you'll find me a bad foe if I was a Jew."

"You threaten me?" said the sailor, fiercely.

"I was advise you, capt'ins."

"Well, be reasonable and split the difference, making it seven thousand five hundred."

"I'll do that, capt'ins, for I was not a mean man," and the Jew arose, went to a safe and took out a number of bank notes.

These he counted out until the required sum lay on the table before the sailor, who quickly

ran over them, thrust them into his pocket, and said:

"Now I'll leave you, Bergheim, and the craft shall start at once on another cruise, and this time I hope the cargo will be a more valuable one."

"I hope so, too, Capt'ins Ivan," replied the Jew, and taking the lamp from the table, he escorted his visitor to the outer door through a long narrow hallway.

Closing the door behind him, and firmly bolting it, the Israelite returned to his room and quietly drew off a wig and false beard, so natural in appearance that no one would have suspected their not being real.

With his face thus exposed, there was not a feature of the Jew visible; it was, in fact, the face of a man of thirty, bold, resolute in expression and full of intelligence.

"A good bargain that, for the cargo is worth double what I paid for it in cash," he said, as he sat down at the table, and ran his eyes over an inventory of his purchase.

"Another year and I will be rich enough to act, and when I do I will bring ruin upon Almont Morency—yes, utter ruin, and then only will I be avenged for the past," and the man's eyes flashed with the emotion that seemed to thrill him as he made the threat against one for whom he held an undying hatred.

In the mean time, the sailor had gone on his way toward the harbor. Reaching a wharf, he had there taken a small boat and rowed himself out to a small craft that lay at anchor, a cable's-length off shore.

A man in seaman's garb met him at the side and the two entered the cabin together.

"Captain Dorcas, I wish you to sail at once to the island retreat, and you will find there another cargo."

"Should it not have arrived, await for it, and return here within as short a while as you can," ordered the masked smuggler to the man who had entered the cabin with him.

"I will, sir."

"Here is your share of the last cargo, and the pay for the crew also—one thousand in all."

"Thank you, sir."

"And you said the price of the last cargo was twenty-five hundred?"

"It was, sir."

"Well, here is that sum also, and you see my profits are small, for the accursed Jew would only give me four thousand for it."

"It was too little, sir, for it was worth far more; but then we cannot be over-grasping in the prices we get," said Captain Dorcas.

"Very true; and now, good-night, and *bon voyage* to you! Send a man to put me ashore, please."

Five minutes after the masked smuggler was ashore, and the little vessel, setting sail, stood out to sea.

Walking rapidly along, the smuggler entered a narrow alley and stopped at a door, which he opened with a key drawn from his pocket.

Half an hour after the door again reopened, and out stepped a man of striking presence, fashionably attired and yet a close observer might have detected a strange resemblance in his form and bearing to the sailor who had refused to unmask before the Jew.

But he was unmasked now, and wending his way along a fashionable thoroughfare, he soon turned into a brilliantly-lighted saloon, and when he left it in the gray of dawn, he had lost at the gambling-table every dollar he had received from the Jew, except what he had paid into the hands of Captain Dorcas.

CHAPTER XI.

A MAN'S VOW.

ABOUT a month after the mysterious murder of Duncan Moore, as the stranger who had asked the hospitality of Morency Manor had at first called himself, a man sat alone in a pleasant room in the outskirts of New York City.

The room overlooked the Hudson River; the occupant was seated in an easy-chair, which was placed so that he could gaze out upon the scene before him, for he was an invalid.

His face was pale and haggard, as though he had just recovered from a severe illness, and he had seemed to enjoy sitting there and looking out upon the scene rather than reading any of the books and papers lying on a table close at hand.

"It is strange that I have had no word from him. I cannot account for it," he muttered to himself.

As though at last he did not enjoy the thoughts crowding upon him he took up a paper and glanced over it.

"I do not think it will hurt me to read a little, though the doctor said that I should not," he said, and he began to glance over the headings of the news.

Suddenly he started, grasped the paper more firmly and cried, in a low, earnest tone:

"My God! what is this I see?"

Glancing at the date of the paper, he saw that it was an issue of the day before.

Then, with compressed lips and staring eyes he read as follows:

"A MYSTERIOUS MURDER!"

"MORENCY MANOR, THE HOME OF MR. ALMONT MORENCY OF LONG ISLAND, ENTERED BY NIGHT AND A GUEST SLAIN AND THE MANSION ROBBED OF A LARGE SUM OF MONEY AND VALUABLE SILVER PLATE.

"NO CLEW TO THE ROBBERS AND MURDERERS!"

"We have just learned of a most mysterious murder having been committed two nights ago in the elegant home of Mr. Almont Morency, one of the richest land-owners on Long Island, and whose mansion is almost palatial in its appointments.

"It seems that a gentleman on horseback stopped at the mansion, early in the evening, and asked for the hospitalities for the night.

"He was made most welcome, dined with his host, who found him to be a man of extreme culture, and the two sat up conversing until a late hour of the night.

"The next morning Mr. Morency was awakened by his butler with the startling information that the safe in the library had been forced open and robbed and a large quantity of solid silver plate taken from the dining-room.

"Further search revealed the fact that a ladder had been placed against the window of his guest's room, and that gentleman, who had given his name as Duncan Moore, lay dead on the floor, and his clothing showed that he had also been robbed of all money and valuables.

"A coroner's jury was at once summoned, and the inquest revealed nothing more than the facts stated, no clew whatever being found to the murderers.

"It is supposed that the murderers thought the stranger to be Mr. Morency, who once roomed in that part of the house.

"Who the unfortunate man was, other than knowing his name, no one can tell, and Mr. Morency will be glad to have any one who can give him information upon the subject communicate with him at once.

"The body was buried in the private burying-ground of the Morency family, on the estate, and Mr. Almont Morency has offered a large reward for the discovery of the murderers, who are thought to belong to a band of Sound smugglers that of late have committed a number of criminal acts along the coast.

"We sincerely hope that the murderers may be discovered and punished for their crime."

Having read this notice of the foul murder, the stern-set lips of the man parted, and then came the low uttered words:

"My God! he went there to his death! Poor, poor Duncan! How sad your fate, when it was hoped that it would be so different!"

Then he took up the paper again and slowly read aloud every word of the article.

"My God! how could this be so? Why, oh, why, was he allowed to die thus?"

Again he was silent for some moments, and then broke out with:

"And I have been chained here by illness, while he went to his death!"

"Oh! how bitter this blow is to me, heaven alone can tell!" and the man buried his face in his hands, and seemed almost overcome with grief.

"But, I must not give way, or I will be thrown into a relapse, and that will never, never do.

"No, I must rally, grow stronger, and then there is work for me to do, for the murderer, or murderers of Duncan shall be hunted down.

"Yes, I will take the track, and whoever has done this cruel deed, shall find me a very blood-hound upon the trail.

"I am well fitted for the work! No man living can follow the trail like one working for revenge.

"How strange this murder was, and under that roof, the one night that he sought shelter there. Can there be something back of all this that the paper did not find out? It looks to me as though there was some mystery here.

"Well, be it a mystery, I'll unravel it, and woe be unto the one that dealt the death-blow to Duncan Moore!" and worked up by his feelings, the man sunk back in his chair, his eyes closed, and it seemed as though the spark of life had fled—so death-pale and motionless was he.

A strange sight it was: a man upon the brink of the grave vowing vengeance upon an assassin, and resolved to pursue to the bitter end the mystery of that tragedy in the manor.

CHAPTER XII.

LED BY DESTINY.

THOSE were pleasant August days at Blue Cottage, which Celeste Vivian spent, for twice did the Ideal put into the little harbor and her master spend a few days in port, passing most of his time in walks, rides or drives with the beautiful girl whose life he had saved.

"I see how it is going," said Mrs. Evans to herself one day. "Celeste will marry that handsome man.

"Well, I suppose it is all right, for twice has he saved her from death. He appears to be a splendid fellow; but then, appearances are deceitful many a time, and, somehow, I don't feel as if he was all that he would have us believe.

"I may wrong him, and I guess I do; but I have never dreamed of him that he has not been metamorphosed into a tiger, a devil or a skeleton, and, though I am not superstitious, I admit that this does impress me.

"Well, he's far better to all appearances than the brainless fops up at the hotels, who seem to

love her so devotedly, and I believe she would rather marry a man with a spice of Old Nick in him than any one of these poor gilded youths of society."

So soliloquized Mrs. Evans, after Almont Morency had paid his last visit to Blue Cottage, but had promised to come soon to The Pines, whither Celeste was going to return at the end of August, for she was completely restored to her former perfect health.

After the affair in the surf, which had so nearly proven fatal to her and to Mabel Hathaway, Celeste had been the belle of the place, and every one had sought an introduction to her, and she was forced to come out of her quiet life and mingle in the gayety of the hotels to a certain extent.

She found her new friends, the Hathaways, charming people, and little Mabel was her devoted companion.

The beauty of Celeste, and the rumor that she was very wealthy also made her an object of great attraction to the young society men; but all had noticed that when the pretty yacht Ideal dropped anchor in the harbor the lovely girl seemed to be willing to have Almont Morency monopolize all of her time.

That young gentleman was also an object of admiration to the many beauties at the seaside resort, for he was known to be the master of an elegant home and large income, so there was considerable angling for him.

At last the days of August ended, and Celeste and Mrs. Evans started for home.

Mabel promised to come and pay her a visit there some time in the near future, and she wept bitter tears when she bade Celeste farewell.

En route for The Pines Celeste stopped a few days in New York to make a few purchases, and while there received a letter from Lulu Vance.

Breaking the seal she read:

"MY VERY DEAR CELESTE:—

"We have been on the go all the summer, or I would have written you before, as I promised to do, for I have something to tell you that will be a surprise.

"Whom do you think I met in New York, early in July?

"Why, none other than the great hero, our Unknown."

"I had gone to visit a friend at a hotel, accompanied by a beau whom my father wishes me to marry, and into the parlor, while we were waiting, came the unknown hero!"

"I at once went up and spoke to him, and he was so modest that I really confused him; but I told him how deeply grateful I was for his saving my life, and asked him to give me his name and address, that papa might call upon him.

"His name is Almont Morency—there's a romantic name for you—and he was stopping at the Astor House.

"Papa called the next day, but he had been called suddenly away, so I have not seen him since, but hope to, for I wish to show my gratitude in some way.

"And that reminds me, my sweet Celeste, that I owe to you my life also, and I fear that I have not shown you how much I appreciate your noble conduct toward me.

"I was ugly and hateful to you at the Academy, but you forgave that, did you not? and you proved it by inviting me to visit you at your beautiful home, The Pines.

"And I am coming, Celeste, early in September, if only for a few days, so we can talk over old times, and also chat about the mysterious Unknown together.

"Expect me about the tenth, but do not put yourself out to entertain me, and if not agreeable to have me, wire me to my address not to come.

"Ever lovingly,

"LULU VANCE."

The reading of this letter somehow left a painful impression upon the heart of Celeste.

Before she had met Almont Morency to know him, she would have been glad to have Lulu visit her, that she might show how little feeling she held against her.

But now she felt uncomfortable at the thought of her presence as a guest, but she decided to at once wire her to come, for she would be welcome, and so she sauntered out from the hotel to go to the telegraph-office herself and send the message.

By a strange coincidence she turned into the wrong doorway, and saw her mistake only when she beheld a sign before her which read:

"MADAM LULU VIVIAN—

Prophetess of Fate.

Reader of Life-lines and Destiny in the Stars."

Celeste turned pale as she read this sign, while she said, in an almost frightened tone:

"Her name and mine, thus joined! and I was just going to telegraph her.

"What strange fate guided my steps in here? What indeed! Dare I enter to investigate this remarkable association of names? Yes, I will."

And Celeste entered the door of the abode of the "Prophetess of Fate."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROPHETESS OF FATE.

HAVING decided, from the strange motive that influenced her, to investigate this fortune-teller, whose name was such an astonishing commingling of her own with that of Lulu Vance, Ce-

leste Vivian touched her little bell, and almost instantly the door opened, while a deep voice said:

"Enter, lady, and know thy destiny."

Celeste was startled at the deep tones of the voice, but was not the girl to give up a purpose once formed.

She entered a hallway draped in crimson, and at the other end, holding a curtain up for her to pass was a negro.

He was deformed, for his height was not over five feet, his legs short, his arms of great length. His head was massive and the face full of cunning intelligence.

His attire was rich, being of red and black velvet, trimmed with silver lace, while costly lace served as cuffs, and was about his huge neck in a ruff or puffed collar.

Upon his head was a turban, in front being a red star set in an ebony crescent.

"I would see Madam Lulu Vivian," said Celeste, now regretting that she had been foolish enough to enter the place.

"Be seated, lady," and the negro motioned her to a chair in the reception-room which she had entered, while he disappeared beneath a curtain upon the opposite side from that which she had come in.

Only a few chairs were in the room, with a lamp burning upon a table in the center, and the walls were hung with black curtains, giving all a most funereal appearance.

In a minute the black returned and said:

"The lady will please follow Kiddoo."

Rising, Celeste followed the negro, who had referred to himself as Kiddoo, and found herself in a large room circular in shape and hung with blue curtains.

Overhead was a dome, painted to represent the heavens, with stars bespangling it.

There were several seats in the room, a table in the center having a lamp which, by means of a reflector threw its light up at the ceiling, leaving the lower part of the weird-looking place in half-obscurity.

Upon one side of the table was a velvet lounge, and no other furniture the large apartment contained.

"Be seated, lady," said the negro, and he disappeared, while, a moment after, there swept into the room, through the parting curtains, a veritable Oriental queen, dazzling with diamonds and other precious stones, and wearing a dress of somber velvet that swept in a long train behind her.

The face was as dark as a Hindoo's, and yet every feature was perfect.

Her hair was as black as night, and braided about her head like a coronet, while her eyes were large and as bright as the diamonds she wore.

She might be a woman of thirty, and perhaps but eighteen, for it was hard to tell.

Her form was slender, willowy and full of grace, and certainly she was a most attractive-looking person.

Innumerable gems were worn by her, in necklace, earrings, bracelets, armlets, belt and finger-rings, for she was covered with jewelry.

She carried in her hand a small gold basket, which was also full of gems, there being three of each kind, from rubies and diamonds to pearls and emeralds.

"You have come to hear what I can tell you of your future, lady?" said this Oriental queen, in a low, sweet voice.

"Yes; an impulse seized upon me to do so, when by accident I entered your door instead of the one leading to the telegraph-office."

"You are brave to come alone."

"What have I to fear? and besides, I am half ashamed to let any one know I was so foolish as to come."

"You have no faith, then, in my powers?"

"I cannot say that I have."

"Ah, lady, your actions belie your words, for you are here to test my powers."

"Having come, pray do not detain me longer than necessary," said Celeste, somewhat coldly.

"I will not detain you long—see, these gems are represented by the natures of different human beings. Let me see which is yours," and she placed the gems in an ebony tray upon the table, while she added:

"For every gem in this salver I wear one as an ornament.

"Now let me blindfold you, please, and then place your hand in the tray and select any gem you wish. You can hesitate, take up as many as you wish, but the one you decide upon is your fate gem."

Celeste gave a slight shudder, but submitted quietly to being blindfolded—the woman's touch being gentle as that of a babe.

"Kiddoo!"

In answer the negro re-entered, and Celeste knew that he was standing near her.

"Please withdraw your gloves, lady," said the fortune-teller.

This Celeste did.

"Now, place your right hand here," and she took Celeste's little hand and placed it upon something that was hard and round. The very touch told her it was a human skull, and feeling the presence of the negro, she knew that he held the grim object.

Then she heard the rattle of the gems, as they were poured from the little basket into the ebony salver, and the woman said in a low, solemn voice:

"From these gems select the one that makes thy fate."

Celeste did so, selecting one that first touched her fingers.

The salver was then placed upon the table, the negro retired with his grinning emblem of death and Celeste was freed from the handkerchief over her eyes.

"Sit there, lady!"

She obeyed, and the woman then threw herself full length upon the lounge spoken of, and gazed up at the dome.

Instantly, by an ingenious piece of mechanism, the stars in the dome began to slowly move, and dark clouds flitted across them.

Gazing upward Celeste saw these changes in the miniature heavens with wonder, while still clasping the gem she had selected in her left hand.

"Lady, part of your life has been one of contentment, with grief at the loss of dear ones. Your star, I see, goes its way alone, which shows that you have been without friends to ever watch and guide your footsteps.

"Your star is a bright one, showing a nature full of joy, and yet, now and then dark clouds flit across it.

"I see also that it is hidden now, indicating that your life well-nigh ended on one occasion, but it reappears again, and—oh! it disappears again under the same black cloud; so twice have your days well-nigh been brought to a close.

"Now I observe that another star draws near your own, and it has a dark cloud hovering over it constantly.

"I see still another star following the path of yours, and it has a greenish caste, which means jealousy and hatred against you.

"This bids you beware of one over whom the cloud casts its shadows, and of the star with the greenish tinge, for I see that your star and the others glide toward a mass of midnight clouds—yes, they disappear in them, and this warns you not to trust those whom you believe to be your devoted friends.

"Let me see the gem you hold, please."

The woman arose from the lounge, the panorama of the heavens ceased to move, and Celeste, pale and wondering, handed to the woman the gem.

"It is a shaded pearl, and so agrees with the story read from the stars. See, this side is all purity, for this is your life now, but here come the shadows, and the pearl is almost black upon this side; so be warned, my dear young lady, against one man and one woman who have crossed your path.

"Whatever they appear to you, be sure that their hearts are masked.

"I have read your fate, lady, and it remains with you to steer clear of the hidden rocks upon which those you trust would wreck you."

Celeste was deeply impressed, and bowed her head for a moment in grief at the thought that she had enemies who meant her harm.

When she looked up the prophetess of fate had gone, having noiselessly glided away; but Kiddoo stood ready to conduct her to the door.

To him she paid the price demanded, and then she hastened out into the street with a sigh of intense relief.

Entering the telegraph-station she sent a dispatch to Lulu Vance, and, as she reached the pavement again, she saw a carriage dash by, and the two persons she saw within caused a cold chill to run through her heart as she murmured the words:

"Almont Morency and Lulu Vance—and together!"

"No, no! I must be mistaken," and feeling faint, she entered a passing cab and was driven to her hotel.

CHAPTER XIV.

LULU'S LETTER.

ONCE more at The Pines, Celeste felt her spirits revive, for since her visit to the fortune-teller, and the quick glance she had had upon leaving there of two persons in the passing carriage, she had been strangely moody.

She had been warned against two persons who were her friends, a man and a woman.

How remarkable, she thought, that Almont Morency and Lulu Vance should pass at the very moment after she heard that warning!

Then, too, that they should go by together, when she believed Lulu still away from the city at Newport, and Morency cruising in his yacht somewhere along the Maine Coast!

"I was mistaken, for it could not have been they," she argued with herself, and accordingly her spirits rose, and she became cheerful once more.

She set about making The Pines beautiful in every respect, to welcome her guests, for Almont Morency had promised to run up in his yacht, after his return, anchor off-shore and pay daily visits to the lovely girl during his stay.

She knew in her own heart that she had begun to love Almont Morency with all her soul.

It might have been because he had twice saved her life that he at once became most dear to her, but certain it was he had completely fascinated her and there was but one man in the world to her.

The thought that her old school-girl rival might again become her rival, this time in love, was something that grieved her deeply.

The words of the Prophetess of Fate would come up before her; but she would not connect Almont Morency with them as the man the fortune-teller had referred to, while she held a dread that Lulu Vance was the woman in question.

Such was the reasoning of her heart.

So passed several days; then a letter came for Celeste, which she at once recognized as from Lulu.

It was quite a lengthy epistle, and very characteristic of the writer.

It was dated at Newport, and was as follows:

"MY OWN DEAR CELESTE:—

"I have another surprise for you, for, what do you think? I have met our Unknown hero again, and I again owe my life to him!

"It was in this way:

"A party of us started on a yachting cruise for a week, for papa allowed me to go along, greatly to my surprise, and, one night, when in Long Island Sound a fearful storm came up.

"We, the pleasure party, thirteen in all, were almost frightened out of our wits, and would not go to bed, and well for us it was that we did not, for, at midnight, in the midst of a pouring rain, and when we were driving furiously along, a huge shadow loomed up near us, and, ere we could cry out, there came a fearful crash, and our little vessel was a wreck.

"In spite of our wild cries for help, the large steamer passed on, leaving us to our fate, and a fearful fate it threatened to be, for our yacht was sinking.

"One of the boats was crushed in, and the other had been dragged away by the wheels of the steamer, so we looked death squarely in the face, and the captain said the yacht would not float an hour.

"You can well understand our despair, my dear Celeste, and the scene that followed beggars description.

"One of the crew had been killed in the crash, and several others were wounded, and their groans, added to the howling winds, praying and wailing, made up a scene never to be forgotten.

"Suddenly out of the darkness came a hail:

"'Craft, ahoy!'

"'Ay, ay!' responded our captain, and then followed the words:

"'Were you not run into by a steamer just now?'

"'Yes, sir, and we are sinking rapidly.'

"'Who are you?'

"'A yacht out of Newport with a pleasure party on board, among them many ladies.'

"'Ay, ay! I will save you all,' and at the words, a wild shout went up from all on our sinking vessel.

"We now heard the creaking of blocks and flapping of sails, and soon after, saw emerge through the gloom a craft which our captain at once said was also a schooner yacht.

"She tossed wildly upon the waters, but lay to, as they call it, and a life-boat was lowered and came toward our yacht.

"It came up under our lee, the sailors said, and had four oarsmen and an officer in the stern.

"By the light of the lanterns, what was my amazement to recognize in the officer who had daringly come to our rescue, none other than Almont Morency, the gallant Unknown hero of the academy fire.

"I called his name aloud, in spite of myself, and he raised his hat politely, and recognizing me as the glare of the lanterns was in my face, said with the utmost coolness:

"'This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Vance. We seem destined to meet under perilous circumstances, do we not?'

"'Well, my dear Celeste, after great danger we were all transferred to the rescuing yacht, and the kindness of Mr. Morency, in first taking the helpless wounded on board, won the hearts of all.'

"Then followed the ladies, next the gentlemen of our party, and last the crew, and you can tell how narrow was our escape from death, when I tell you that the seamen had to put on life-preservers and jump into the sea to be picked up by the life-boat, as the yacht went down under their feet.

"In each case did Mr. Morency risk his life in going to and fro in the boat, and, after we were all on board, his yacht made us as comfortable as was possible.

"He had heard the crash, as the steamer struck us, and our cries, so had come to the rescue.

"As we were not far from New York, we ran to that port, and taking carriages, caught the first train for Newport.

"Mr. Morency was most kind to me, and drove me in a carriage to the depot, and expressed the hope that we would soon meet again, and I assure you it shall not be my fault if we do not.

"Upon my return I received your telegram, so you may expect me soon, as we go back to our home in the city in a couple of days.

"Now, is not all this strange, and how romantic a coincidence it is that Mr. Morency should again cross my path as he has.

"With love, and the hope of soon seeing you,

"Your devoted friend,

"LULU."

The fair brow of Celeste clouded as she read the letter, and she tried to find some flaw in it, to coincide with the words of the Prophetess of Fate; but, she could not, for it had been for Lulu Vance a lucky accident that she had again crossed her path.

Then Lulu had told her the story with seem-

ing frankness, as it had occurred, and it had accounted for the fact that Celeste had seen the two together in the carriage that day.

Some accident had doubtless caused Almont Morency to change his plans about cruising along the Maine Coast, and that would account for his yacht being in the Sound when she thought it was far to the eastward.

There was nothing she could censure in all of the letter, Celeste had to frankly admit; but the closing words of Lulu Vance gave her pain:

"It shall not be my fault if we do not meet again," referring to Almont Morency.

CHAPTER XV.

A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

THE pretty yacht Ideal again lay at anchor in the little cove, which formed the harbor of the Morency Manor.

Her master was once more in his palatial home, resting after the cruising he had done during the summer months.

One afternoon he took a walk, as was his wont, down the long graveled avenue, lined with Lombardy poplars, which led to the country highway half a mile distant.

He was smoking a fragrant cigar, and his handsome face wore a serene expression, as though he was at peace with the world in general.

As he ascended a slight rise in the avenue, his eyes inadvertently turned toward the family burying-ground, lying in a grove of trees a couple of hundred yards to the right.

What he beheld there caused him to start and utter an exclamation, while he came to a halt.

"Who can it be there?" he muttered, as his eyes fell upon a saddle-horse hitched just outside of the railing of the burying-ground.

As if to decide this question he briskly walked toward the spot and, his steps unheard, he came upon a scene which caused him to halt, for, kneeling by the grave of the man who had been murdered in Morency Manor was the form of an old man.

A moment did Almont Morency stand gazing at him, and across his face flitted expressions of what was in his mind.

Then he said, in a kindly tone, to make the mourner aware of his presence:

"I bid you good-evening, sir."

The man arose quickly, turned, and bowing to the master of Morency Manor, said:

"I hope that I have not intruded, sir; but the one who lies here was most dear to me, and some kind hand has placed over his grave this marble slab."

"I ordered that done, sir, for I am Mr. Morency, and this is the burying-ground of my family."

"Ah, sir, I have come far to visit this spot, for only of late did I discover that Duncan Moore was dead."

"And what was he to you, may I ask?"

"As one very dear, sir, for, though no kindred ties bound us, he was one as dear to me as a son could be to a father. Will you tell me of his death?"

Almont Morency was silent for a moment and then said:

"It is strange, sir, but when I first saw Mr. Moore, he was standing near where you are, and asking the hospitality of my home for the night, I made him welcome."

"May I ask you also to be my guest, and, as Mr. Moore seems to hold some claim upon you, I will make known to you all that I can regarding his sad fate?"

"I thank you, sir, for I came here to see you and learn all that I could about him, and seeing this graveyard turned aside to visit it, supposing that he had been buried here. I will accept your hospitality with many thanks."

Morency bowed, and unhitching the horse led the way toward the mansion.

There the stranger's horse was taken care of, and, as he requested to occupy the room in which Duncan Moore had met his death, he was shown to it, greatly to the surprise of Corks, who had never entered the chamber since that night of murder.

"I am glad that you are willing to take that room, sir, for my servants behave in a very silly way about it, declaring that it is haunted," said Morency, when the old man joined him in the library before dinner.

"Duncan's ghost will have no fear to me, sir, if it is true that our spirits do roam the earth after we die," was the reply.

Dinner was soon after served, and the visitor proved to be a pleasant companion, though his manner was subdued and sad.

He was a man of fine presence, with snow-white hair and beard, and age had bent his shoulders until he stooped in his walk.

He was well-dressed, had certainly the appearance of a gentleman and conversed understandingly upon many subjects.

After dinner the two adjourned to the library, and lighting a cigar, Morency said:

"Now, sir, I am willing to give you all the information in my power about your friend?"

"He came here on horseback, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, and his horse is now in my stable and at your service, or I will pay you your price

for him, if you wish, and keep him, as he is a fine animal."

"I will sell him to you, sir, at your own price; but now let me know just how poor Duncan met his death, please?"

"I met him, as I told you, sir, as I did you, at the graveyard, and brought him home with me."

"Corks showed him to the room you occupy, we had dinner together and I was charmed with his wit and conversation."

"After dinner we talked together here until nearly midnight, he seated in the very chair you now sit in."

"Then we parted for the night, and retiring to my room I knew nothing more until called in alarm by Corks in the morning, and informed that my desk-safe—that one you see there, had been broken open and robbed."

"I regret to say, sir, that my first thought was to accuse the strange guest; but soon after I saw that my silver service had been stolen, and then we made the discovery that my unfortunate guest lay dead in his room."

"I gave these particulars to the coroner's jury and to the papers, advertised a reward for the murderer or murderers, had your friend buried, reserving his clothes and what little the midnight marauders had left him, and these things are at your service."

"Having no word from any one, I concluded that Mr. Duncan Moore was friendless and alone in the world, so I would be obliged if you would tell me what you know regarding him."

"I have to thank you, Mr. Morency, for your kindness to my unfortunate friend, but, as to his antecedents, regret to say that it is not for me to enlighten you."

"I met him in the Far West, and he befriended me, saving my life on one occasion, and from that day we were inseparable friends."

"He left me some time since, as he said to hunt up some family ties, and that his fate had been so sad a one I did not know until I accidentally discovered it in the papers some time ago, and decided to visit you and know the whole truth."

"You have no idea yet as to who these murderers are?"

"None other than that they are doubtless of a band of Coast Smugglers, who have been committing lawless acts along the shores of the Sound."

"But they had nothing against my friend."

"True; but the blow was doubtless directed at me, as the room he occupied had once been mine, and this was perhaps known to the marauders."

"My theory is that he awoke, and, finding them in his room, boldly attacked them and was killed in the encounter."

"But, do you know nothing whatever about him?"

"Very little, sir, other than that he was an exile from his home for some reason, but he had little to say upon this matter."

"Do you think that his name was Duncan Moore?"

"I have no reason to doubt it; but, why do you ask?"

"Because no one has appeared or written until you came, to learn about him, and so I thought the name might have been assumed."

"That is true," said the guest, quietly, and soon after retired to rest."

In the morning he arose early, breakfasted with his host, received payment for the horse of Duncan and then took his departure, promising Almont Morency to write him if he could learn aught else of his murdered friend."

That night following, the master of Morency sat alone in his library, musing over the visit he had received from the mysterious old man."

Suddenly he started, as it occurred to him that he did not even know the name of his guest, had paid him for the horse of Duncan Moore and taken no receipt, and could not again find the old man if he wished to."

Then he arose and unlocked his safe, and a cry of horror broke from his lips as he saw that a bundle of valuable papers was gone, and among them his father's will!

The money was intact, but the papers had vanished!

Who could have taken them but the mysterious visitor, and, as if to prove this, a duplicate key of the same, one Morency had never seen before, lay upon the floor as if dropped there by accident, and there were drops upon the desk from a candle."

"By Heaven, he was a thief! He came here to rob this safe of certain papers, and he has done so. Who can he be and what his motive?" and with this question to answer Morency threw himself into a chair and became lost in deep meditation."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SMUGGLERS' ISLE.

UPON an island on the coast of Maine, a man stood watching, glass in hand, the approach of a small vessel, running down from the eastward, and keeping close in-shore."

The man was dressed in the garb of a seaman, and his bronzed face was by no means a prepossessing one."

He stood upon a cliff, and in his hand held a glass, which he at times leveled at the coming craft."

A few paces back of him was a thicket of pines, and within this was a rude log hut, just large enough for one person to make himself comfortable in."

There was a seat in it, a small fireplace, and that was all, excepting a string of flags hung upon the wall."

"It is the Advance, so I can get my pick before the Puzzle comes," muttered the man, and going to the cabin he took down the string of flags, selected three of them, and, placing them on a long pole, went out to the edge of the cliff and raised it."

Soon after a corresponding signal was run up upon the coming vessel, and lowering the pole the man returned the flags to their place and walked back into the island."

There, on the shore of a small cove, completely sheltered, was a cabin far more pretentious than the one on the cliff."

It had two rooms, and they were not uncomfortably furnished."

A woman sat before the door, reading, and, as the man drew near, raised her head, displaying a bold, handsome face, and one that was youthful, too."

Her form was graceful, though she was dressed in a loose-fitting sailor suit, but her face and hands were bronzed to the hue of an Indian."

"Well, Caspar, is the Advance in sight?" she asked."

"Yes."

"And the Puzzle?"

"Is not in sight."

"Good! Then we have a chance to bury a few things, as before?"

"We have, and a few more such chances will lay up enough for us to leave this island and live in comfort the rest of our lives."

"But have we not enough now, Caspar?"

"No, but we soon will have, Ruth."

"That is what you always say, Caspar; but I hope soon your greed for gold will be satisfied, and we can leave here, for I am tired of being buried."

"As I am; but we must be patient," and the man walked down to the shore of the little cove, on the quiet waters of which rode at anchor a small but stanch little sloop."

A skiff lay on the shore, and running it into the water, the man sprang in and paddled out into the cove, just as the craft he had signaled came running in under jib alone."

She was a stanch, roomy craft, schooner rig, and just such as was used for a coaster in those waters."

But five men were visible upon her deck, and any one seeing her would have taken her for an honest coaster or fishing craft."

"Well, Carr, I am ahead of the Puzzle, it seems," called out a bluff-looking man who stood at the helm."

"You are, Captain Fogg, so come ashore with me and my wife will get us some supper, while your men unload the cargo," answered Caspar Carr."

The anchor was soon let fall and a large boat lowered, while the captain stepped into the skiff and was rowed ashore by Caspar Carr."

"Well, Carr, are you ready to buy a little on your own hook?" asked the skipper, in a low tone."

"Yes, if you sell very cheap, and give me the best."

"I'll sell cheap enough, for money to me is better than merchandise, and I have silks, laces, wines and jewelry which I have managed to lay aside," and Captain Fogg winked knowingly."

"Tell me, captain, do you have only smuggled goods?" asked Carr."

"Why, Lord bless your innocent soul, Caspar, we have smuggled goods, piratical booty, and in fact, all we can lay our hands on."

"The fact is, our chief in the city employs a gang of burglars at a good salary, and these bring him the goods they raid, and they have orders to get only the best."

"Then he has dishonest clerks under his employ, in various kinds of shops, and they steal a bolt of silk here, a roll of lace there, in the dry-goods line, or watches and gems in the jewelry line, while others manage to get hold of cases of the finest wines and brandies."

"We have a regular depôt, and I go there to get my cargo to bring here, and carry back a load of fish, while the Puzzle runs the freights to Boston and New York, and the chief gets rich, while you and I, in our way, can accumulate a snug little sum, so as to retire from business when we get enough, for there is danger in the work, Carr, simple as it seems, and every time I go ashore I am in dread if I see a man coming behind me, fearing he is a detective."

"You are right; but now what can you let me have?"

"I'll give you for five hundred what you can get five times that sum for; but you do not sell it to the Puzzle's skipper, I hope?"

"No indeed, for I am no fool. I carry it in my little sloop there to the mainland, where I have a purchaser for it."

The two men had landed meanwhile and now

approached the cabin, where the woman bade the skipper of the Advance welcome, and invited him to supper."

In a cabin among the rocks the crew now began to store the valuable cargo brought by the Advance, and Caspar Carr and the skipper stood by to see that the goods which the latter had, as he expressed it, "managed to lay by," were kept separate."

When darkness came these same goods were secretly carried by Carr and his wife to a secure hiding-place beneath the floor of their own cabin, and the key of the store-house, which Captain Fogg was supposed to keep, was secretly returned to him in the morning."

Soon after sunrise a sail was sighted, heading toward the island, and a glance at it showed Caspar Carr that it was the Puzzle, the craft which they now longed for."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE UNKNOWN CHIEF.

THE little vessel that was sighted heading for the island, was a trim craft that had much the appearance of a yacht, or pilot-boat."

She came along at a good rate of speed, and when past the island put about, stood inshore and then headed for the cove."

But, she had held on her way until Caspar Carr, from his point of lookout on the cliff, had signaled her as he had the other vessel."

As before Caspar Carr had gone out to meet her in his skiff, and, when he stepped on deck, he was met by the same man who had received his instructions from the masked personage whom the reader has seen, first at the office of Berghelm, the secret salesman, then on board of the Puzzle in Boston Harbor, and afterward coming out of a gilded gambling saloon where he had lost the money received from the Jew."

Taking Captain Dorcas ashore, Caspar Carr led him to his cabin, where Skipper Fogg awaited him, and the three men, seated at a table which the woman had placed outdoors for them, began to discuss the business before them."

"I have brought you a splendid cargo this time, Captain Dorcas," said Skipper Fogg."

"It will please the chief to know it, for he needs money he told me," answered Dorcas."

"He must live like a prince to spend what he does," Caspar ventured."

"Yes, he must, indeed, for how does he get away with the money he makes, Dorcas?" asked Captain Fogg."

"He has many expenses, you know, for he has quite a troop of men ashore to pay, and our two vessels certainly cost something large to run, and then there is Carr here who gets a neat salary."

"I have figured all that, Mate Dorcas; but for the life of me I can't see what the chief does with his money, for he must be getting from fifty to sixty thousand a year over expenses."

"I cannot tell you, mates, and I am not the man to ask him," said Dorcas."

"He is so terrible then?"

"He's a fine gentleman in his manners; but once or twice I have seen him mad, and then he was the devil himself."

"How was that, mate?"

"Well, I had reason to suspect treachery in one of my men, and so reported to the chief."

"He at once told me to seize the man and put him below, and when I left the next night he would take a short cruise with me."

"And did he?" asked Caspar Carr."

"He did."

"Well?"

"He came aboard at night and we put to sea."

"When a few leagues out he came on deck and asked for my man, and I had him brought on deck."

"I had him searched and found a letter on him directed to the captain of the revenue cutter in port, offering, for a given sum to turn over to him an entire band of smugglers, with two vessels and much booty."

"I had given this letter to the chief and he had read it, so when the traitor came on deck he shivered when he saw the eyes of the chief turned upon him."

"They fairly blazed through the holes in his mask, and—"

"He always wears his mask I am told?"

"Yes, Captain Fogg, I have never seen him without it, though the mask is so made and fits his face so well that no one at first would suspect him of being masked; but to go on with my story."

"Yes, for I am anxious to know what he did," Captain Carr said."

"What he did? Why he just looked at that poor wretch until it seemed he saw clean through him, and then he said in a voice that quivered, so brim full of mad he was:

"My man, you were not content to receive five times the pay you could get as a seaman in any other service, and to have little work to do and good living, but you must break your vow to this band and seek to betray your comrades into the hands of the officers of the law. When death to some of us, and long imprisonment to others would follow."

"As for myself I would have been beyond

your reach, for no man knows me as I am, and I have spies that post me when there is danger around, so I could escape; but this vessel's crew, and the others could not have escaped, so I now shall cause you to suffer for your crime."

"Mercy, chief, mercy!" cried the poor fellow.

"But he might as well beg mercy of a stone, for the chief ordered him loaded with irons and thrown into the sea."

"The wretch shrieked wildly at this, and I was about to beg mercy for him, when one of the crew stepped aft and said:

"See here, chief, you shall not punish that man."

"Lordy, mates, they were the last words he ever spoke, for the chief sent a bullet into his brain quicker than a flash, and then called out to iron the prisoner, tie him to the dead body and toss them overboard."

"And was it done?" asked Carr, with a shudder.

"No, he was only fooling the fellow," Captain Fogg said.

"You are off your reckoning, skipper, if you think so, for the orders of the chief were carried out to the letter, and I tell you not a man on board dared to falter under the eye of the man that gazed upon them."

"And then?"

"Well, he coolly ordered me to stand in for Portsmouth and put him ashore there, and I came on here in my voyage after booty."

"This was some months ago, and not a man on board the Puzzle has ever questioned an action of the chief since."

"And who is he, Mate Dorcas?" asked Skipper Fogg.

"I only know him as Captain Ivan, and if I saw him face to face to-day, without his mask, I would not know him, and it's an uncomfortable feeling, I can tell you, for no one knows when he has his eyes upon him."

"But let us get to business, for I have the money to pay you for the last freight," and the law-breakers at once became busy with the work before them.

The cargo in the hut was then placed on board the Puzzle, and just after dark fell the two vessels got up their anchors and sailed out of the cove, one going up and the other down the coast, while Caspar Carr and his wife were left once more alone upon their island.

"We must be careful, Caspar, for you have heard Dorcas's story of what a devil that chief is," said the woman, as they sat alone in their cabin that night.

"Yes, we must be careful, indeed, when a man masks his face his actions are also masked, and we know not when or how he may be watching us," replied Caspar.

"I only wish I knew who this Unknown Chief really was!" said the woman, her curiosity greatly aroused.

But Caspar Carr could give no hint as to who the chief was, for he was as much in the dark as all others who served under him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOREBODINGS.

SOME days after the reception of Lulu's letter, Celeste drove down to the landing to meet the steamboat, and was not disappointed in seeing her old rival at school step ashore.

She greeted her warmly, introduced her to Mrs. Evans, and while a servant with a cart looked after the baggage, Lulu was driven rapidly along toward The Pines.

She looked a trifle sunburnt after her summer at the seaside, but more beautiful than ever, and Celeste was compelled to admit that she was certainly a very lovely maiden and would make a most dangerous rival.

Mrs. Evans was charmed with her, and Lulu ran on about how she owed her life to Celeste, and then branched off upon her adventure on the Sound, when the yachting party had so narrowly escaped death.

"I tell you, Celeste, Almont Morency is a splendid fellow, and I only wish you could know him as he is, for of course the night of the fire you were too much alarmed to remember him, though I did even the little glance I got of him after I came to from that swoon."

"Suppose I tell you that I remembered him also, Lulu, and so well that I recognized him in a box at the theater?" said Celeste, with a smile.

"You did?" asked Lulu, in amazement.

"Yes, and sent my guardian to fetch him to our box, but he was unable to come."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and I will tell you that I have met him since then, Lulu."

"Since the theater?"

"Yes; and more, like yourself, I again owe him my life."

"You tell me wonders, Celeste," and the beautiful eyes of Lulu Vance were filled with amazement.

"And, strange to say, my second adventure with him was in the Sound, and I will tell you how it was," and Celeste told the story, adding:

"Did he not tell you that he had met me?"

"Not a word," and Celeste felt piqued, while

Lulu's brow slightly clouded at the thought that her old rival had seen Morency so often.

"He promised to visit us here soon, and I hope he will come while you are here," said Celeste, and she meant all that she said, for she wished to see if Morency really cared for her.

"I do hope so," and Lulu's face brightened, and she added:

"I really had little to say to him, or I suppose he would have told me about saving your life."

"He was too modest to do that, Miss Vance, but yet might have spoken of meeting Miss Vivian," Mrs. Evans said.

"We were packed away like sardines in a box, on the yacht, for with our party and crew there were twenty-six of us, and Mr. Morency had a dozen men on his vessel, so that it was a large crowd, and we could talk but little."

"Then, when we reached New York we drove rapidly up to the depot and that accounts for his not speaking of you, for I talked all the while;—but whose lovely home is that we are coming to?"

"That is to be your home, Lulu, as long as you are pleased to make it so," was the hospitable reply.

"That then is The Pines?"

"Yes."

"How beautiful! how exquisitely beautiful all is about it!"

"I do not wonder that you love to stay here, Celeste, and I would not be surprised if you died an old maid, rather than have your beautiful home desecrated by the presence of a horrid man."

"If ever I marry, Lulu, the man shall certainly not answer your description of him," said Celeste with a laugh.

The carriage was rolled into the lovely grounds, from the highway, and soon after drew up at the stone steps.

Springing out Celeste welcomed Lulu with a kiss, and at once led her to her room, which adjoined her own.

"This is perfectly lovely, Celeste," cried Lulu in ecstasies, as she gazed about her at the superb furnishing of the chamber and then glanced out of the window at the magnificent view of the grounds and the Hudson.

After throwing off her wraps, Lulu was ready to descend to the library, and a feeling of envy crept into her heart as she muttered to herself:

"Our home is elegant, but this far surpasses it."

"Celeste must indeed be very rich."

The dinner was what Lulu enthusiastically called "a symphony in edibles," and she ate with a relish that delighted her beautiful hostess.

The silver service was dazzling, the butler perfectly trained, and the wine the very best.

After dinner they took a walk through the flower-garden, and when night came on they adjourned to the large parlors to sing over some of their old school-girl songs together.

When at last bedtime came Lulu Vance retired to her room with her heart full of dread that a maiden so beautiful and with such a home and fortune would surely win the heart of Almont Morency.

"And I love him," she added, almost bitterly.

And Celeste?

She had welcomed her friend with real gladness, and yet, as she gazed upon her beautiful face and form, she could not but feel that in Lulu Vance she had a dangerous rival, should Almont Morency be drawn toward her.

The enthusiastic delight with which Lulu praised everything pleased her, for she knew that she was accustomed to luxuries and possessed rare taste, and she was happy in having made her home so charming, for she wished it also to please the eye of Almont Morency when he should visit her.

It is true that he had seemed to love her society, and he had been very attentive to her; but yet he had spoken no word of love directly, and only his manner toward her had caused her to feel that he really cared for her.

But what if he should fall in love with Lulu?

The dread gave her a real heartache, for she had learned to love Morency with her whole soul, and yet, did he turn to Lulu, she would hide her sorrow and bear it.

She had struggled hard to triumph against her rival at school in music, art and her studies; but she was not one to seek to win a man's love from her.

That was not her nature, and as she sunk to sleep, after shedding a few bitter tears, the last thought in her mind was:

"I'll be an old maid, as Lulu said, if I do not win the love of Almont Morency."

The next morning the maidens arose betimes, and after breakfast, which Lulu enjoyed as she did everything else, they went for a horseback ride to view the surrounding country.

In the afternoon it was a sail upon the river, in the little yacht which Celeste had bought, and which was under the charge of an old sailor.

The next day it was a roam through the hills, a carriage drive, a row on the river, and so on,

to make the time pass pleasantly, and the days thus passed until one afternoon it came on to storm terribly.

Glancing from the library window, Lulu called out:

"See that vessel, Celeste, how she flies along in the gale."

Celeste glanced out over the storm-swept waters, and her face flushed and then paled, while she said:

"It is a yacht, Lulu, and it is the *Ideal*."

"Mr. Morency's?" cried Lulu, clapping her hands.

"Yes."

"I am so glad; but he comes in a storm, does he not?"

The words had a disagreeable jar to them for Celeste; but she said nothing, but with Lulu watched the pretty vessel until she dropped anchor off The Pines and a boat came ashore, with Almont Morency in the stern.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN ASSASSIN.

AGAIN the masked chief of the marauders, who are smugglers as well, is seated in the very comfortable quarters of Carl Bergheim, the lawless merchant who buys the stolen goods brought to him.

"Well, capt'ins, you was have very fine cargo of goods this time, from the inventory I have of them," said the Jew, who had just admitted his visitor.

"Yes, and they are in your warehouse, are they not?" was the cold rejoinder.

"Oh yes, my storekeeper has them goods safe."

"Then I want the money for them at once."

"You say on your inventory ten thousand dollars, capt'ins."

"Yes, no more, no less."

"I will not give so much as that."

"See here, Bergheim, this is a special lot of booty, all valued by my expert, and the actual value at forced sale put down in that inventory."

"It foots up to nearly twenty thousand dollars, and you know that you have a cash market for every article, so you shall not rob me of what is my due."

"You say I robs you, capt'ins?"

"Yes, if you do not give me ten thousand dollars, as I demanded."

"Suppose I was refuse?"

"Then I shall give you up as a dealer, that is all, if I have to go into another business."

"Ah! well, I give you the ten thousand dollars, for I don't wish to break up our friendship."

"Bah! you don't wish to kill the goose that lays the golden egg, you mean."

"Well, give me the money and let me go."

The Jew arose, went to his safe and soon returned to the table with the money, which he counted out slowly, the masked law-breaker also counting it after him.

"The craft returns soon for another cargo, so expect me again in a few weeks," he said, and with a nod he left the room and the house.

As the door closed behind him, the Jew touched a bell and a man appeared instantly.

"Follow that person, and report to me fully what he does in the next twelve hours."

"Yes, sir," and the man disappeared on the track of the masked chief.

In the mean time the one to be dogged, by order of Bergheim, stopped under a gaslight at the corner, and appeared to be looking over some papers which he took from his pocket.

Instead he was watching the door of Bergheim's house, and as a man stepped out, he said:

"As I thought."

Then he took a pencil and hastily wrote a line on a slip of paper, folded it up and held it in his hand as he went along down the street. Turning a corner he met a man whose movements indicated that he had been listlessly pacing to and fro.

"Here," he said, and he slipped the paper into his hand. "There is a man following me, and this explains."

Then he walked rapidly on, and the man met the one who was dogging the masked chief.

He cast a hasty glance at him and halting beneath a gaslight read what was written upon the slip of paper:

"A man is dogging my steps—make an example of him; I take the usual streets."

He smiled grimly, and turning followed the tracker of the mysterious law-breaker.

Toward the most fashionable part of the city the chief then led the way.

The streets were well-nigh deserted and he sauntered carelessly along.

Suddenly a wild cry rung out in the darkness, the cry of a man who had received his death-wound, and it came from the one who was following the chief.

The latter hurried on while windows were thrust up, heads peered out and running feet were heard.

Down to the pier went the masked man, and a few minutes after he was in the cabin of the Puzzle with the Skipper Dorcas.

As before money was paid over to him, the usual remark about having little left for himself was made, and orders given, after which the chief went ashore and walked rapidly to the house in the alley which he had before been seen to enter.

Entering with a pass-key, he made his way up to the second floor and entered, by means of a key he carried, a large and handsomely-furnished suite of rooms.

A man approached from an inner room and said quietly:

"I obeyed your orders, sir."

"You did well, Lomax, and here is a souvenir of my friendship," and he handed him a roll of bills.

"Thank you, sir; but will you go out to-night?"

"Yes, I shall go and try my luck again, for I leave town to-morrow for some little time."

"No one saw you strike the blow?"

"Only the one I struck, sir."

"I knew your way, so headed him off, and you did not see me though you passed so near I could have touched you."

"He felt my knife-blade before he saw me, so I had no trouble to escape."

"You did well, and it will teach Bergheim to be careful how he puts a man on my track."

"Now I will change my clothes and go try my luck once more."

So saying, he threw off the attire he wore, removed the face-like mask that so perfectly hid his features, and half an hour after, as a stylishly-dressed gentleman in appearance, entered the gambling-saloon and began to try his luck with cards once more.

Three hours after he had entered he left the place with a bitter curse hissed from between his teeth, the fickle goddess of fortune persistently turning her back upon him.

The next morning Carl Bergheim read in the morning papers that a mysterious murder had been committed during the night in the most fashionable part of the city.

The assassin had driven a knife into the heart of his victim, but whether from motives of revenge or for money it was hard to say, as the man had not been robbed; but the murderer had perhaps been frightened off by the wild cry that had issued from the lips of the unfortunate wayfarer when he was struck the deadly blow.

The few things found upon the dead man were a purse with some twenty dollars in it, a silver watch and a letter addressed to:

"SCOTT MARTIN,

"General P. O.,

"Boston,

"Mass."

This was a note signed "Kate," asking the man to call upon her on a matter of business, and it was mailed in the city.

"Scott Martin is my man; but, as no one knows my connection with him in any way, I shall not be known in the matter."

"But did the chief kill him, or was it done by some one else who expected to rob him?"

"That is a question I must find an answer to in some way."

"Yes; I must learn just who this mysterious masked man is, and then I will have a hold upon him he cannot shake off."

"As it is, we are about equal."

And Carl Bergheim sat for a long time musing upon a plot to unmask the mysterious chief.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DETECTIVE LEAGUE.

WHEN the old horseman, who had been the guest of Almont Morency over-night, left that mansion, the morning after, he rode at a rapid gallop for several miles and then drew rein in the outskirts of a small village on the coast.

Off on one side of the road, in a grove of woods, was a man seated in a covered wagon, and up to him the horseman rode.

"I am glad to see you on time, Lomax, and you can exchange with me, you taking my horse and going by boat to the city, and I will drive back, so should pursuit follow, I can put them wholly off the track."

The man bowed, sprung out of the buggy, and the old man took his place.

Mounting the horse, he rode away, while the old man took a bundle from under the seat, made a few changes in his clothing, put on another hat, and drove rapidly away across the country.

So it was that when Almont Morency rode into the little village, a few hours after, and asked about an old man on horseback, he was told that a young man on horseback had taken the boat for the city an hour before.

"What was the color of his horse?"

"A bay."

"How old was the man?"

"Scarcely over thirty."

"Did you know him?"

"No, sir, but he stopped at the inn all night, and they might know him there."

To the inn then went Morency, and he saw that the man had registered as Richard Agnew, and had come on the day before, and had been at the hotel all night.

He was at fault, he thought, on this track, so went on another.

He met a farmer who had seen an old man.

"On horseback?"

"No, sir, in a covered wagon."

"With a black slouch hat on?"

"No; sir, a high white hat."

"Had he a black suit?"

"No, a gray one."

Again he felt that he was wrong, and so he returned to Morency Manor to see if the servants whom he had dispatched in other directions had learned anything about the robber guest.

But one by one the three servants had returned, and not one of them had seen or gotten any clew to the guest of the mansion on the night before.

Thoroughly angry with himself, Almont Morency began to look over his safe to see just what had been taken.

The will of his father was gone, that was certain, and so also were a number of time-worn papers relating to an important happening in the Morency family, with a bundle of letters of his own correspondence.

All else was intact, and not a dollar of money, or a piece of jewelry, or the silver service, now kept locked up at night, had been taken.

"What can it mean?" muttered Morency, and his face wore a look of worry.

"I will see that this game is not repeated," he muttered, and he at once sent for workmen to begin the erection of a safe-deposit in his own sleeping chamber.

"Thank Heaven they did not get the secret correspondence papers, which some strange impulse keeps me from destroying—why, I do not know," he said to himself, as he took up a tin box locked and marked:

"Private."

"To be burned unread in case of my death."

"ALMONT MORENCY."

The new safe was placed in the solid wall of the large chimney-piece in Almont Morency's own sleeping chamber, and the one in the library was left for less important documents and valuables.

Then the young master of the manor started upon another cruise in his beautiful yacht, Ideal, and his course lay toward the city of New York.

In the mean time, the ruse of his aged guest had been a success, for he quietly went on his way to Brooklyn, crossed the ferry to New York, and after carrying his horse to a stable, went on foot to a house in Houston street.

He opened the door with a pass-key, and found himself in a comfortable house.

Ascending the stairs to the floor above, he rung a bell and a servant appeared, a man, who said with surprise:

"I did not hear you come in, sir."

"No, I had my pass-key."

"Have I any mail?"

"Yes, sir, your letters and papers there on your desk."

"Any one called?"

"Mr. Lomax, last night, sir, and bade me say he had arrived all right."

"Very well, give me some dinner and then go and tell Mr. Lomax that I wish to see him."

The man departed and the master of the premises, for so he appeared to be, sat down by his desk and began to look over his letters.

No expression on his stern face revealed what his thoughts were as he read them, and afterward he filed them all away.

Then he unfastened the traveling-bag which he had had with him on his trip, and took from it a number of papers which he began to carefully glance over, the while, reading with clouded brow one moment, and a brightening face the next.

This kept him busy for some time, and at last a knock came at the door and breakfast was announced by his servant, Dolph.

As he concluded the meal Lomax entered.

He was the same man who had changed horses with the old man at the village on Long Island, and his face was full of resolution and intelligence.

"Ah, Lomax, I am glad to see you safe back again," said the old man.

"And I to see you, sir, for I felt a trifle anxious."

"No need of that, for our tracks were well covered up; but after all I did not get the papers I needed most."

"Indeed, that is bad."

"Well, I will have to try again, but in another way; but now, from what I discovered, I am determined upon forming the league I spoke of."

"Of detectives?"

"Yes, so I hope you have looked up some good men?"

"I have, captain, and have about a dozen in my mind, the pick of every Secret Service association in the city, and they are men whom you can rely upon to the end, and trust with your honor or your life."

"I will need just twenty such men, and you are to be the lieutenant of the force."

"Their pay is to be one-half more than they receive from the associations, a bonus when the game is run to earth, and all expenses."

"If any one of them fails in his duty, we, his comrades, are to be the judges of what he shall suffer, and I am to have full power to sentence to death or to pardon."

"On such terms you can engage your men, and you are to bring them singly to see me that I may judge of them."

"It shall be as you wish, captain; but how shall I speak of you to them?"

"As captain only, for why need they know any other name?"

"And in writing or telegraphing you?"

"Address simply Number One, with my address."

"Now the sooner you get this league together the better, for I am anxious to begin work," and the "captain" bowed as though to conclude the interview between himself and his lieutenant.

CHAPTER XXI.

A JEALOUS WOMAN.

ENVELOPED in a storm suit and hat, which completely shielded his elegant form, Almont Morency sprang ashore at the pier in front of The Pines, and ordering his boat to return to the yacht, made his way up the grand walk to the mansion.

A servant met him at the door and took charge of his wraps, telling him that Miss Vivian had seen him coming and would soon join him in the parlor.

As he crossed the threshold of the door into the grand parlors, Almont Morency was compelled to admit that the fair mistress of The Pines was a young lady of a great deal of refinement and taste, as well as the mistress of a large fortune which would allow her to indulge in such a luxurious home.

The rustle of a dress caused him to turn from contemplating a fine painting, and instead of Celeste Vivian he started at seeing before him Lulu Vance.

"Miss Vance?"

She thought his face flushed at sight of her, and she hoped that it was from pleasure at the meeting.

"Yes; is this not an unexpected pleasure in finding me here, Mr. Morency?" she said, in her bright way.

"I assure you that it is, for I had not thought of your being here."

"Nor thought of me, I suppose, since we last met?"

"But I am here, you see, the guest of my old schoolmate, to whom and yourself I owe it that I was not roasted that night at Doremus Academy."

"Be seated, please, for I am to entertain you until Celeste comes, for she was called to the servants' hall to see something about a building that has been blown down somewhere on the farm, and so asked me to welcome you."

There was just the slightest shadow upon the face of Morency, but why called there Lulu could not tell.

A moment after Celeste entered the parlor and gave him a warm welcome to The Pines, adding:

"I am so glad Lulu is here to help me entertain you, Mr. Morency."

"Would you have found it an irksome task otherwise, Miss Vivian?" he asked.

And there was something in the words that Lulu did not like.

"Come, let us get out of these solemn parlors into the cheery library, and Mrs. Evans will also give you welcome, Mr. Morency," said Celeste, after awhile.

And they adjourned to the library, though Morency said:

"I cannot see why you call your parlors solemn, Miss Vivian, for they are the most charming rooms I ever saw."

"Even better than those of Morency Manor, of which I have heard so much?" Lulu asked.

"I like The Pines equally as well as Morency Manor," was the reply.

And then Morency stepped forward and grasped the hand of Mrs. Evans.

Thus the day passed, and when dinner was served Morency could not but admit that though there was no master at the head of the table he had never seen a more charming repast, from the cooking and service, to the wines and the company.

In spite of the fact that the storm still continued, Morency went back to his yacht that night, promising however to breakfast at nine with them all at The Pines.

And Celeste and Lulu retired to their rooms after his departure with conflicting emotions, for they had together met the preserver of their lives, and they both loved him.

Which did he care most for, and which would he love?

That was the question each asked herself, and one of them said, between her teeth:

"He shall love me—I mean it!"

And Mrs. Evans, who had thoughts upon this same subject, and as she lay awake in bed that night, muttered to herself:

"Celeste loves him, and so does Lulu Vance."

"But which does he love?"

"I thought that he loved Celeste, until I see his manner toward Lulu."

"Oh, how will it all end, I wonder?"

The next morning Almont Morency was on hand for breakfast, looking very handsome in his yachting uniform.

As he landed from his boat he saw Lulu in the garden gathering flowers, for the storm had cleared away, so he at once joined her, and the two walked slowly on toward the mansion.

That day they took a horseback ride through the country, and Morency again dined at the mansion.

The following day the three ladies went on board the yacht, and had a run up the river for some distance and luncheon with the yachtsman, who again returned to dine with them at The Pines.

Thus the days passed away in some kind of enjoyment each day.

Both Celeste and Lulu possessed excellent voices, and so they sung trios together, for Morency justly prided himself upon his fine singing.

Two weeks thus glided away, and Almont Morency announced his intention of leaving, as he had business in the city that would detain him there for a week, and then he would have to return to his home.

"You must come and see me in the city, Mr. Morency, and drive with us," said Lulu.

"But you will not be there," he said.

"Oh, yes, for I must return to-morrow."

"Why, Lulu, why will you go so soon?" urged Celeste, who was surprised that her guest was to leave her.

"I was sure you were to be with us for a month at least, Miss Vance," said Mrs. Evans.

"I did hope so; but my father's letter this morning said that he hoped I would soon return, there being some business papers he wishes me to sign, for you know an heiress must have to deal with legal matters."

Celeste did not notice that the words had a deeper meaning than appeared; but Mrs. Evans saw that her speaking of herself as an heiress had been purposely done to catch the ear of Almont Morency, and the good lady saw that he had noticed it, but just what effect it had on him she could not tell.

So it was that the Ideal set sail that night, and the next day, Lulu Vance, against all entreaty to remain longer, took her departure for home.

The day following Almont Morency, who was stopping at a hotel up-town, was surprised to receive a call from Mr. Vance, who overwhelmed him with gratitude for all he owed him in saving the idol of his life from death, and urged him to dine with him that day.

Almont Morency regretted that he had an engagement, but he would call soon.

So reported Mr. Vance to his daughter.

Her face flushed and paled by turns.

She went to her room and began to pace the floor, while she mused aloud:

"I fear after all he loves Celeste Vivian."

"But it shall not be, for I will win him, by fair means if I can, by foul means if so it must be."

"She triumphed over me in school, she took from me the prizes that would have been mine but for her, and I hate her."

"My God! has it come to this?"

"Has it come into my nature to hate one who saved me from a fearful death?"

"Yes, I might as well admit it, for it has."

"I do hate Celeste Vivian with all my heart and soul, ay, as much as I love, yes, idolize Almont Morency."

"I must win and I shall, for father told me last night his affairs were such that he might fail, and if so we were beggars."

"He hinted that he had found out that Morency was worth over a million, and to catch him would be to save him from ruin, and with father's downfall I go too."

"It is a desperate game to play, but I will play it to the end, and play to win a heart and a fortune."

"For this I left The Pines, as I did, and I will make Almont Morency love me and ask me to be his wife."

"There are others, scores of them, whom I could win, but I love only that man, and he shall marry none other—I swear it!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A SECRET OVERHEARD.

To commence in her plot to ruin Almont Morency, Lulu Vance sat down and wrote him a note.

It was simply a pleasant little note, asking him to dine with herself and father on the following day, as she wished to ask his advice about a certain matter, which she knew he could advise her upon.

It was a good bait, and it caught Almont Morency, for he replied that he would be most happy to come, as his business affairs would not prevent his doing so as on the day before.

The fact was that he liked Lulu immensely,

and was debating in his own mind which he liked best, the dignified, beautiful Celeste, or the handsome, vivacious Miss Vance.

If he took their fortunes into consideration, he did not show it, and he only hesitated about confessing his love to Celeste when he met Lulu Vance.

The truth was that they were both such lovely girls, were both rich, and so fascinating in manner that he really felt that he loved each one, and it was hard to choose between them.

He found, upon going to the merchant's home to dine, that he lived in a style of princely magnificence.

All about him showed wealth and refinement, and with Lulu as mistress of this superb city home, he felt that a man should certainly be happy to win her.

He was most warmly received by both father and daughter, and both made themselves most agreeable, the merchant showing himself to be a *bon vivant*, and a good and entertaining conversationalist.

After Lulu had left the two to discuss their coffee and cigars, the merchant asked Almont Morency's advice, as had been hinted, regarding the purchase of a large tract of land on Long Island.

Morency told him just what he thought about it, and Mr. Vance at once decided not to make the purchase.

Then they adjourned to the parlors, and soon after some one called Mr. Vance out, and Lulu was left alone with her guest.

"Pray await my return, Mr. Morency," Mr. Vance had said, and as the evening passed away Almont had heard the butler open and shut the front door a number of times, and he knew that visitors had been turned away for his sake.

This flattered him, strange to say, and when at last, near midnight, Mr. Vance returned with some excuse about a "very sick friend," Lulu had almost won the heart of Almont Morency.

So it went on for days, with rides and drives and dinners together, and one day Almont Morency went up to the mansion determined to ask Lulu to be his wife.

The butler was not on duty, and a strange servant who let him in showed him into the library, which adjoined the private room of Mr. Vance, saying that Miss Vance had merely run around to the florist's and would soon return.

The low voice of the servant, and the tread of Morency upon the velvet carpet seemed not to be heard by two persons who were earnestly conversing together in the room adjoining the library.

Almont Morency did not care to be an eavesdropper, and so coughed to make his presence known.

But it was unheard, and he was about to call to Mr. Vance, when he overheard something which caused him to start, and then to listen.

The speakers were talking earnestly, and their voices now and then were raised.

Every word they uttered could be distinctly heard, and though it might not have been gentlemanly to listen, Almont Morency did so.

But only for a few moments did he listen.

Those few moments seemed enough for him, as he turned, his face white and teeth set, and glided from the library across the hall into the parlors opposite.

There he paced to and fro in deep and evidently painful thought, from the hard expression that marred his handsome face.

Soon there came the ring of the bell, the servant came from the rear of the mansion and admitted Lulu.

She came right into the parlor, looking very lovely in her sun-bonnet and morning-dress, in which she had gone to the florist's.

She had an armful of flowers, and greeting her visitor warmly, said:

"I will give you this rosebud for your button-hole, for it was so good of you to come and see me this morning."

"I came to say good-by, Miss Vance," he said.

He saw her face change color, while her voice quivered as she said:

"Are you going away?"

"Yes, for some time."

"You said only last night you were to remain a week yet."

"Circumstances I cannot control call me at once away, so good-by."

"Must you go at once?"

"Yes, now," and he held out his hand.

"When shall I see you again?"

"I do not exactly know."

She showed pique, and said:

"You do not seem to care if you never do?"

"Therein you mistake me; but I have to be off, so say good-by to your father for me, and I have to thank you for many pleasant hours during my stay, and some day I hope to reciprocate."

He grasped her hand and was gone, while she, dashing the flowers upon the floor stamped her foot in a perfect rage.

"Gone! and not one word of love to me."

"Yet last night I could have sworn that, but for the coming of old Dawson he would have asked me to be his wife."

"There is some cause for this."

"Can Celeste Vivian have come to the city, I wonder?"

"I will find out," and with flushed, angry face she swept into the library.

There she beheld a handkerchief, just as she heard voices in the next room.

She picked up the handkerchief.

It was Morency's, for there was "A. M." embroidered in the corner.

"He has been in here"—and she listened a moment—"and he has overheard what they are saying," she said savagely, and into the adjoining room she strode.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SACRIFICE.

WHEN Lulu entered the little room off the library, where her father and another person were seated in animated conversation, a silence fell upon the two.

Her face was white with anger, and her eyes flashed as she turned them upon her father.

Emanuel Vance sat at a table, with a lot of papers spread out before him, and opposite to him sat an old man, one who had at least passed his three-score years, and yet whose face was a strange one, full of cunning rather than intelligence.

He was almost foppishly dressed, wore diamond studs, a heavy watch-chain and a massive ring, while in lieu of the hair he had lost he had a wig, which he seemed to flatter himself no one would suspect of being such.

"Ah, Miss Lulu, I am happy to see you," he said, rising as she entered the room.

"And you might add that you had been discussing me, Mr. Dawson," she said, sharply.

"Yes, I did speak of you, and I often think of you, as I believe you are aware," he said, with an effort at gallantry.

"Father, from the conversation I overheard, as I came through the library, you and Mr. Dawson seem to be arguing a point which neither of you can agree upon," she said, paying no attention to Mr. Dawson's effort at gallantry.

"It is upon a matter which I have told you, my child, so I need not hide anything from you."

"I really would like to know what has been the subject under discussion the past half-hour."

"You are aware that I owe Mr. Dawson notes to the amount of one hundred thousand dollars, my child?"

"So you have said."

"I owe in other debts fifty thousand, and my partner, who does not know how the firm stands, having left the entire management to me, wishes to sell out for cash to go abroad."

"He told me he would take one hundred thousand dollars for his share, but he wishes it in cash, and I have my house and the store-building under mortgage, and can raise nothing."

"I therefore asked Mr. Dawson to help me out with a loan of a quarter of a million, which would put me upon a firm basis; and more, I told him that you were to marry a young millionaire, from whom I could get all the money I wished, and could pay him back with large interest."

"And what did Mr. Dawson say, father?"

"That he would let me have the money, if you would become his wife."

"Ah! Mr. Dawson has done me the honor to ask me to marry him before this; but pardon me, please, for a moment," and Lulu left the room and entering the hall touched a bell.

The same servant who had admitted Almont Morency appeared.

"Did you admit Mr. Morency when he called?"

"Yes, miss."

"Where is Joseph?"

"Gone to see his sister, miss, who is ill."

"Did you show Mr. Morency into the parlor?"

"No, miss, into the library."

"Who ushered him into the parlors?"

"I do not know, miss, but he was there, I saw, when you came in."

"That will do," and Lulu retraced her steps to her father's private room, and the words came to her lips:

"He first entered the library and heard all; yes, heard how my father was to marry me to him and then get money from him."

"That accounts for his leaving as he did, and now I will act for myself."

As she uttered the last word she entered the room.

"Father, please tell me just what terms Mr. Dawson offers for my hand?"

"Allow me to tell you, Miss Lulu," said Mr. Dawson, quickly.

Lulu bowed and sat down, and Daniel Dawson in a most business-like way, said:

"As I understand it, your father ran his business up to make his share worth say a quarter of a million."

"But he got extravagant, and lived as a man might who possessed a fortune five times as large."

"Then he entered into speculation and lost heavily, and the result is he is mortgaged, and

if sold out to-day would have nothing, for his partner, by the terms of agreement, could claim all above debts.

"A quarter of a million would put him on his feet, free him from debt, and start him anew as sole member of the firm, allowing him to pay his partner the one hundred thousand he asks."

"That sum your father owes me, so if I give one hundred and fifty thousand to him, he will be all right, and, as his business pays largely, he will soon be a rich man again."

"Now I will give him the notes he owes me, and the rest needed, if you will become my wife."

"I will do so under one consideration," promptly said Lulu.

"But, my child, you forget that you are as good as engaged to Mr. Morency," said Mr. Vance, anxiously.

"You are mistaken, father, for Mr. Morency has never asked me to marry him, and really I am quite attached to Mr. Dawson."

Daniel Dawson was delighted, and springing from his seat with wonderful alacrity, bowed low.

"But the condition, my sweet lady?" he urged.

"That you give me one year before you claim me as your wife?"

"My dear child, what is done for me must be done at once," said her father, with considerable anxiety in voice and manner.

"Then, Mr. Dawson, I will send and secure a clergyman who shall marry us at once, only you must vow, Mr. Dawson, to keep the fact a secret for one year."

"But will you agree to these terms, Dawson, for I confess they seem silly to me?"

"If needs be, I must; but I cannot understand Miss Lulu's wish to have it so."

"It is a caprice, a whim, and in fact, I have seen so little of life yet, and wish to enjoy myself before I settle down to the staid life of an old man's darling."

"You will visit us often, drive with us Sundays, Mr. Dawson, but for one whole year be under a pledge to keep the secret of our marriage."

"Do you accept my conditions?" and Lulu laid her hand upon his shoulder and gazed lovingly into his eyes.

"I do."

Two hours after they were married by a young clergyman, and Daniel Dawson handed over to Mr. Vance his notes and a check for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, for the old bachelor was several times a millionaire.

Thus had Lulu Vance sacrificed herself, either to save her father, or for some secret purpose of her own.

Ten minutes after the ceremony she was in her own room sobbing like a child, while old Daniel Dawson and Mr. Vance were in the library, growing mellow from drinking each other's health.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FOILED.

THE swift-sailing outlaw craft was again in port, and her rich cargo of smuggled goods and stolen plunder had been safely delivered into the keeping of Carl Bergheim.

That worthy had gone carefully over the inventory, looked at the goods, and packing them up in different parcels had sent them to different merchants who paid cash for them, "as a bargain," and, if they suspected that there was anything "crooked" about the getting of them they did not investigate to discover the truth or not.

Carl Bergheim had received his pay in full, and it was in his safe, and he sat cogitating over his profits, for he meant to pay the law-breaker only about half what he got.

He knew very well that the masked chief could get pretty nearly full value from some others; but the risk would be great, and it could not be arranged with a few men only in the secret as it then was.

The chief had led Carl Bergheim to believe that he got only smuggled goods, but that astute worthy had frequently seen American merchandise in the lot and knew that there must be some other way of procuring the booty than by smuggling them in from Canada.

If he suspected the truth, he held his peace.

He had his plans well laid for getting the cargo, whenever Dorcas brought it into port, and it was accomplished so skillfully that not once was the suspicion of a revenue officer aroused, nor did the harbor police ever suspect the honest-looking craft as other than a little coast trader.

So it was that Bergheim, alleged Jew pawnbroker, sat in his comfortable quarters, wondering why the Unknown Law-Breaker had delayed in his coming for his money.

"He is always so prompt," he muttered. "Well, I am getting rich, and when I have gotten my fortune I will act."

"A short while longer and I will have a fortune, at the profits I now make."

"If the means are questionable, that is known only to myself."

"No one knows me other than as Carl Bergheim, the Jew."

"No one will ever know that I have been Bergheim, the pawnbroker, when I can revel in wealth."

"But who is this mysterious chief?"

"I sometimes think that we have met before, but for the life of me I cannot tell if it is so."

"He has masked himself well, when he deceives my sight."

"I would that I knew him, for if I did I would hold a power over him to keep him from being troublesome."

"When he comes, I will discover if he it was who killed poor Martin."

"Well, I'll put men on duty here at night, for he comes only in the darkness, to track him to his den, and then I will ferret him out."

So mused Carl Bergheim, and to carry out his intention he selected two of his best Secret Service men, for he had men secretly in his employ to guard against surprise and perils, and these were put on duty in a little room near the outer door.

Hardly had they taken their places when a ring came at the door.

"It is his ring; he has come," said Carl Bergheim, and he went himself to the door and admitted his visitor.

"Well, Jew, I suppose you were in hopes I was dead and you would be able to keep the twenty thousand you owe me on my last cargo?" said the Masked Chief, brusquely, as he entered the room and threw himself into a chair, while he lighted a fragrant cigar which he took from his pocket.

"Twenty thousand, capt'ins?" cried Bergheim, with a look of alarm.

"Yes, that is the sum I named, for you have there a splendid lot of goods."

"Why, man, one item alone is a hundred bolts of silk, every yard of which is worth three dollars, not to speak of the satins, brocades, velvets, gloves, laces, jewelry, and a hundred other articles of great value."

"Yes, I said twenty thousand, Carl Bergheim, the Jew."

"Oh, capt'ins, I was only able to pay twelve thousand."

"I expected you would say so, but my ultimatum on those goods is sixteen thousand, and if you don't want them at that I know who will take them."

"We must not quarrel, capt'ins; but you was drive a hard bargain, with so little profit to me."

"Jew, you are a miraculous liar, for you know well what the goods are worth."

"What do they cost you, capt'ins?"

The unknown law-breaker started slightly at this, but said:

"Did I pay the value for those goods, at wholesale price and with duty they would cost me all of thirty thousand; but I do not pay half value and no duty, so I get them low, though they cost much in the way of money, danger and plotting."

"Say if you will give me my price, Jew, or not?"

"I will pay you, capt'ins, even if I make nothing."

"But, capt'ins?"

"Yes."

"What was you kill my mans for that I sent after you to bring you back to see me on a leetle business I was forget when you was here?"

The question came abruptly, but the reply was prompt, and without quiver in the voice.

"Kill your man—what man?"

"The one I was sent for you. Scott Martins was his name."

"I saw no man and did not know that you sent for me; but I recall now seeing in the papers that a man of that name was assassinated."

"That was so, and I thought you was kill him."

"You are a fool, Bergheim, and afraid of your own shadow, for why should I kill him?"

The Jew thought after all that he was wrong, so said:

"I did not know but that he was walk quick upon you and you was think he was a robber mans and kill him."

"No man can walk close upon me at night, Jew, without expecting death; but I did not kill your friend, whether you sent him to dog my steps, or to fetch me back to see you, and I very much suspect the former was the real cause, that you put him on my track as a spy, for I know how anxious you are to see my face."

"I was want to know, yes, capt'ins."

"Well, you will not know; but come, I want my money."

Carl Bergheim arose and went to the safe, got out his money and soon placed the large amount before the law-breaker.

"Thank you, now good-night," and the chief arose and departed.

Hardly had he gotten out of the door when two spies were set upon his track.

But they quickly returned and made report to their master.

"We followed him, sir, but at the corner he had a man holding his horse, and a second man was also there."

"The chief mounted, sir, and dashed away at a rapid gallop, and the two were turned toward

us, and bade us go home, saying that they had their eyes upon us."

"Then we saw that they were policemen, and we hastened back to report to you."

"Very well, another time," and dismissing his men Bergheim muttered a curse, and then from between his teeth came the words:

"Foiled! Curses on him, he has foiled me in my game!"

"But I will yet know who that man is."

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNKNOWN GAMBLER.

WITH a light laugh, at the manner in which he had foiled Bergheim, the Masked Chief of the Law-Breakers galloped away in the darkness, and after a rapid ride, in which he doubled upon his course several times, he stopped at a stable not far from his dwelling-place, gave his horse to a sleepy boy in waiting, and walked to his abiding-place.

It was not very long before he came out again, dressed most stylishly, and wended his way toward the gambling saloon.

He was accompanied by a man, to whom he said:

"Go at once to the vessel and give the note to the skipper, and then return home."

The man saluted with the air of one who knew that he was in the presence of a master, and went off down the street toward the harbor, while the chief once more entered the gilded gambling saloon.

His coming was greeted by the proprietor with a welcome smile, and the latter said:

"There is a gentleman here to-night, sir, who is anxious to play for large stakes, and there is no one here who can accommodate him."

"Perhaps as you play for large money you would oblige him?"

"Certainly," and the chief entered a room and the two were soon seated at play.

The stranger was a Cuban, evidently a gentleman, for his manners were courtly, and he began by asking that the stake should begin at one thousand dollars.

The Unknown Chief bowed assent, and the game was won by the Cuban.

Another game for a like amount followed, and with the Cuban the winner.

So it went on until the chief had lost seven thousand dollars.

All through he had been perfectly calm, and now he said:

"Let us make the stake three thousand this time, Señor Alferro?"

"As the señor pleases," was the reply.

This game was played cautiously, and lost by the chief.

Then he leaned forward and said:

"Señor Alferro, you are a card-sharp, nothing else, and I have been cheated out of my money."

The Cuban was upon his feet in an instant, his hand upon a weapon in his bosom; but the proprietor of the gambling saloon, Dick Reeves by name, instantly sprung between the two men and cried:

"Hold! there shall be no trouble here."

"As long as you have been coming to my saloon, sir, I do not know your name, but I tell you frankly you had no right to accuse a gentleman of cheating."

"I do so accuse him, Richard Reeves, for I am sure that he cheated me."

"You shall answer for this, señor, with your life," cried the Cuban.

"As you please, sir, and having engagements that call me away day after to-morrow, it can be soon settled, if Mr. Reeves, who gives you a character, will act for you," was the calm reply.

"I will act for him, as I know him to be a gentleman, if he so desires me to be his second," said Reeves.

"Yes, señor, you are most kind, for I am a stranger in your country, traveling merely for my pleasure."

"Then, Sir Nameless, for you seem not to wish to have your name known, where can I find your second?" and Dick Reeves turned to the Law-Breaker.

After a moment of silence he said:

"I am glad there are no others present, other than this servant, for I have no desire to go to prison for fighting a duel."

"I have a friend in port who is a skipper of a trim little coasting craft, and he will be my second, while we can get him to run us to some point on the coast where we will not be hounded by the police."

This plan seemed to suit Dick Reeves, for he well knew the danger to himself, should he be caught in a duel.

As for the Cuban, he seemed indifferent as to place or time of meeting.

It was soon decided that the gambler and the Cuban should drive down to a certain wharf in an hour, and the chief would meet them there, and that the weapons should be swords, for the stranger was given the choice of weapons with an indifference on the part of the Law-Breaker that was proof that he did not care, and had perfect confidence in himself.

The Law-Breaker then left the gambling-saloon and returned rapidly to his rooms.

He was there but a short while and then, with

a traveling-bag in his hand came out and made his way to the wharf.

Springing into a boat he was soon alongside of the Puzzle, and Captain Dorcas met him at the gangway.

The captain had never seen his chief unmasked, so did not know him, and asked:

"Well, sir, how can I serve you, for this is a late hour to make a call?"

"True, sir, but I come with a letter from your chief, and, what trouble I may put you to, you shall be well paid for."

"Ah, thank you," and the skipper invited his visitor into the cabin while he hastily opened and read the letter handed to him.

It bore the strange device of a skeleton hand clutching a handful of gold-pieces, and was as follows:

"This will introduce to the Skipper Dorcas my friend, Captain Nameless, who wishes the services of himself, crew and vessel for a short cruise.

"Serve him as you would your chief, the
"UNKNOWN LAW-BREAKER."

"This is a command, sir, and I am wholly at your service, as well as is the Puzzle and her crew.

"I had a letter from the chief to-night saying I would not have to leave port for several days.

"When will you start, sir?"

"Within the hour, and I would have you send a boat ashore for some friends.

"The fact is, Captain Dorcas, I am to fight a duel, you are to be my second, and we wish to go to some island on the Maine Coast to have the meeting.

"Your chief spoke of an island which he said was a rendezvous you often went to."

"Ah, yes, I will take you there to the retreat, and should you be wounded you can be well cared for."

"And it is a good place for graves, should the other man be killed, eh?"

"It is, sir; but you know our chief well, then?"

"I do, sir, very well, indeed, for we are fast friends."

"May I ask if you ever saw his face?"

"I have, for to me he is unmasked.

"Many others also see his face, but they do not know him as the Law-Breaker."

"I see; well, sir, the boat is ready, and by the time you return the Puzzle will have anchor up and sail set to run out."

Placing his traveling-bag in the bunk assigned to him, the chief went ashore in the boat, towing the other, which he had gone out in, back to the place he had taken it from.

Just as he arrived a carriage drove up and two men sprung out.

They were Dick Reeves and the Cuban, Señor Alferro.

"I have seen the captain, sir, and for a consideration he is willing to land us at a point on the coast where we can fight," said the chief, and he addressed Dick Reeves.

The two were satisfied, and they put their weapons and a traveling-bag in the boat and stepped in themselves.

"Captain Dorcas, these are my foes, sir, the Señor Alferro, of Cuba, and Mr. Richard Reeves, a gambler.

"You see, gentlemen, I do not refer to you as my friends," said the chief, with a sneer.

The two men bowed and entered the cabin, being somewhat surprised to find it so neat and comfortable.

Putting away their traps they went on deck, and saw that the little schooner was already moving.

Sail was rapidly spread, and the fleet little schooner Puzzle went flying out of the picturesque harbor of Boston bound upon a mission of death, and under the will of the mysterious Law-Breaker, who was unknown to his own crew.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CONFESSION.

CELESTE VIVIAN was not so obtuse that she did not see the motive which her rival had in leaving The Pines when Almont Morency was forced to go away.

She knew that Lulu had expected to remain much longer, and had Morency not left she would have done so.

"It is the same way she served me at school, for she was as cunning as a fox to get the best of me if she could.

"She loves Almont Morency, there is no doubt of that, and I cannot blame her for doing so, for he is all that is lovable and noble; but she should not take underhand means to win him.

"He is interested in her, too, for I can see it.

"When he is with me I believe that he loves me, and yet, when Lulu appears, shadows creep into my heart for fear he may love her.

"It is said that she is ambitious to be richer than she is, and I have heard it whispered that her father's financial affairs are not in a satisfactory condition, and this may be her motive as well as loving him, to secure the enormous fortune he possesses.

"Ah, me! gladly would I give her every dol-

lar of my fortune to have her give him up, for somehow I fear her."

So mused Celeste Vivian after the departure of her guests.

A few days after she went with Mrs. Evans to the city, and, wishing to give her kind, good friend a sight of the Park, Celeste drove her out there.

Suddenly her face blanched, for, through the trees, in the equestrian path, she saw two persons riding slowly along on horseback.

"They are Lulu and Almont Morency," she said, in a cheerful tone; but Mrs. Evans saw that she was hurt deeply at the sight.

Celeste and Mrs. Evans were not observed by Morency and his fair companion, and they rode on out of sight.

That night Celeste went with her guardian to the theater, and, unable to get a box they took seats in the orchestra.

Again did Celeste start, for in one of the boxes sat Lulu Vance and Almont Morency, and they were alone.

From that moment Celeste found no enjoyment in the play, and the next day she took the boat for The Pines.

On the way to the boat the carriage passed through the street where Lulu Vance lived, and ascending the steps of her handsome house was Almont Morency.

"Three times in twenty-four hours," she murmured, and it was with relief that she again reached her home.

There the singing birds, the flowers, the scenery, her horses and her duties took her thoughts partly away from this sorrow growing upon her.

But the iron was in her soul, and she could but feel it.

Did she attempt to play upon her harp, she was sure to strike up his favorite.

Did she sing, her selection was a song which they had sung together.

Did she take a walk, it was sure to be along the woodland paths which he had loved best, and his favorite flowers she was wont to wear each day upon her bosom or in her hair.

One day, some weeks after the departure of her guest, Celeste went alone for a row upon the river.

Mrs. Evans watched her sadly, for she had read her secret well and knew just how she suffered at heart.

Lazily she pulled along, until suddenly she cast her eyes down the river.

She started as she did so, for they fell upon a vessel coming like a race-horse up the river, under full sail, and flying along under the light wind as she knew only a yacht could do.

"It is the Ideal!" she cried, and her face flushed painfully.

Then she rowed rapidly shoreward, made her little boat fast to the pier and again looked at the coming yacht.

There was no doubt of it, the vessel was the Ideal, and she was standing rapidly in toward the anchorage off The Pines.

Whether to fly or to remain Celeste did not know.

At last she decided to remain, and going to the summer-house picked up a book she had left there and sat down, as though to read.

But not a line could she see.

Her eyes were blurred with tears.

Why had Almont Morency returned?

Was it to tell her of his engagement to Lulu, her rival?

Was Lulu with him, having run up the river for a sail?

Such were the thoughts that crowded rapidly upon her, and it was only by a mighty effort of will that she could control herself at all.

She saw the crew of the Ideal taking in the upper sails, then the foresail came down with a run, and the flying jib followed.

The next moment the Ideal luffed up into the wind and there followed, as she slowly glided along, a heavy plunge, as the anchor was let go.

A boat was then lowered and Celeste saw the well-known form of Almont Morency enter it.

As he approached the shore he raised his hat and a moment after he sprung out upon the pier.

She met him as he did so, her face pale with dread.

"I am nappy to see you, Miss Vivian, and I feared you did not remember my vessel, as you seemed so engrossed in your book," he said, as he grasped her hand.

"Yes, I recognized the Ideal at my first glance; but this is an unexpected pleasure, as I hardly thought you could tear yourself away from New York to visit me again."

He saw that she knew of his having been the while in New York, since leaving The Pines, and so said:

"On, yes, for my business that kept me there was consummated yesterday, and I determined to visit you ere I returned home."

"Did not Lulu send me her love?"

He winced at this, and replied:

"She did not know of my coming to see you."

"But I am forgetting my politeness, so now let me ask you to the house."

"No, for you see my yacht is still under sail, and I came but for a moment, as it were."

"A moment?" and she saw as she spoke that his manner was excited.

"Yes."

As he spoke he led her into a rustic arbor at one side of the path leading to the mansion.

It was covered with a running vine, just twisting with the chill of autumn, and was a pretty little retreat, a favorite place of his.

"Yes, Celeste; I came but for a moment to place my heart and hand at your feet, and to beg yours in return."

He spoke the words in a low, earnest way that few women could have resisted.

She was completely taken aback, and for a moment could not speak.

That he was engaged to Lulu she had felt certain, and that he had come to tell her of it she was sure.

"You love me?" she asked, while a look of amazement swept over her face.

"I do, Celeste, with all my heart and soul."

"And Lulu?"

"I like very much as a friend only."

"One question."

"A hundred, if you wish."

"Did you ever tell Lulu that you loved her?"

"Never."

Then he added:

"Why should I? for from the night I saved your life in that burning building I have loved you, Celeste."

"Is my love to be cast aside?"

"No, no; why should it be, when I frankly confess that this is the happiest moment of my life to know that you love me!"

He drew her to him, kissed her lips, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"NUMBER ONE."

In the rooms of "Number One," as the old gentleman who had visited Morency Manor for one night had been pleased to call himself, a number of men were assembled.

They were a well-dressed, resolute-looking set of men, a score in number, and they regarded their leader with considerable interest.

He sat at a desk, a lamp-shade so arranged as to keep his face in the shadow, while the faces of all else present were in the bright light.

"Gentlemen!"

And the tones of Number One were deep and distinct:

"I think we understand each other perfectly; but I will give a *résumé* of your duties and obligations.

"Mr. Lomax has engaged you for special service, having his pick among the secret associations of the city to get the best men, for I will have no man who is stupid, who is a coward and cannot think when need be.

"Your pay is to be one-half more than what you have been getting elsewhere, all expenses, and a *bonus* when I have done with your services.

"In return you are to have certain duties to perform, all of which Mr. Lomax will direct you in.

"I need not tell you that I expect every man to do his duty in my service, and should one prove treacherous that one will regret the day that he was born.

"I shall have the right to punish such a one, and I am merciless in the execution of laws.

"Who I am, it matters not to you.

"Whether I serve others, or myself, is of no consequence.

"All I ask of you is your duty, and honesty toward me.

"Gentlemen, Mr. Lomax has your instructions ready for you, for each one, and will hand them to you as you pass out.

"To you all I am known simply as Number One."

The old man bowed, as he spoke, the men returned the salute, arose and passed out, each one handed a paper by Lomax as he did so.

Hardly were they gone when from an inner room Lomax led several others.

These had a different appearance from the others, for hardly one was well dressed, and there were several women among them, the latter closely veiled.

Then there were two ragged urchins, whose pert faces and knowing looks showed that they were street gamins.

"My friends, I believe that Mr. Lomax has explained to you that you are under my pay?"

They all bowed assent.

"Your services will be to act as spies upon certain others who are doing secret service work for me.

"I will pay you well, and all that you discover you are at once to report to Mr. Lomax.

"He will give you written instructions by which you are to be guided.

"Now you can depart upon your duties."

They bowed in silence, received their instructions from Lomax and departed, but not by the way the others had.

These were led through a long, narrow corridor, down a flight of stairs, and found egress into a street in the rear of the one which the others had departed by.

The house in this back street was an old, dilapidated structure, and had the appearance of being unoccupied.

Having let the party out, one by one, Lomax

returned along the corridor to the room of Number One.

"I hope, Lomax, the duties of these last people will be useless; but it is just as well to have them as spies upon our detectives, so they can know that there is no deceiving me, and if there is a traitor among them, we can get at it."

"Yes, captain."

"You sent a good man, I hope, to ascertain just what the wealth of the old merchant, Vance, is?"

"Yes, sir."

"And another to find out where Mr. Almont Morency goes cruising in his yacht?"

"I did, sir."

"A third to work up that murder case in the Morency Manor?"

"Yes, and the detective I put on that trail is a bright fellow, and sly as a fox."

"It will need a bright fellow."

"And I put one to dog Mr. Morency's steps when ashore."

"That was right, and I wanted one man, you know, to discover all he could about this rich lady, Miss Celeste Vivian."

"I sent a good man on that work, sir."

"And you were careful to put two men, wholly unknown to each other, on each duty, and tell them to go in disguise, so we can compare their reports?"

"Yes, captain, but of course not to let any one man know that another was on the same duty as himself."

"That is right; and there were special men set to ferret out that old-time matter we talked over?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I think now we have laid our nets, some good will come of it."

"But there is much work ahead of us, Lomax, and it will take a long time to ferret all out."

"It will, sir."

"By the way, did I put down the fact that I wished to know if Mr. Almont Morency was engaged to either of those ladies he is attentive to, or had even been married?"

"Yes, sir, that was one of the things to be found out."

"Then all is well, and I have hopes for the future of the successful termination of my plot, which, I may as well confess to you, Lomax, is to gain revenge."

"My truest friend, the man whose place in my life you are taking, was cruelly murdered, and I am determined that the guilty shall suffer for it."

"Now, I need certain papers, so I will set about a plan to get them," and after some little further conversation with Lomax, Number One arose and soon after left the house.

But before doing so he assumed a disguise, and no one would have recognized in him, as he appeared then, the white-haired chief of the Secret Service Allies.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RESULT OF AN ACCIDENT.

THE fleet yacht *Ideal* lay again at anchor in the cove of Morency Manor, for her master was at home once more.

The grand old mansion was thrown open and it looked its very best.

Seated upon the broad piazza smoking a cigar was Almont Morency, while a number of papers lay by his side.

Suddenly along the gravel drive leading to the highway his eyes fell upon a man approaching.

The evening was close, though it was the fall of the year, and a mass of clouds were rising, betokening a coming thunder-storm.

The man approached, whip in hand, and glancing warily about with the air of one who feared to be set upon by dogs.

Seeing Almont Morency upon the piazza, he walked up to the steps, touched his hat and said:

"Please, sir, but my carriage has broken down, and as I have some ladies with me I made bold to ask help from you."

"Certainly, my man. Where is your carriage?"

"At the gate, sir, on the highway."

"I will order a team to send after your carriage, and will accompany you to offer the ladies the hospitality of my home, for a storm is rising."

"Thank you, sir, they'll be delighted, I know."

The orders were given by Morency, and then he accompanied the coachman out to the highway.

There the carriage was found, with one wheel broken down, and standing by the roadway, with her arms full of autumn leaves, was a young and lovely girl, while on a log not far away sat an elderly woman.

Politely raising his hat, Morency approached and said:

"I am Mr. Morency, and my home is but a short walk away, so let me beg that you will remain over for the night?"

"You are very kind, Mr. Morency; but I fear we would put you out."

"This is my daughter, Miss Balfour, Mr. Morency."

Almont Morency bowed low to the daughter, who just then approached, and repeated his request that they should go to the manor, adding:

"A severe storm is rising, and if you have far to go night will overtake you."

"Yes, we are going down on a visit to the Bostwick Farm, sir, and could hardly hope to reach there until late, so we will accept your kind hospitality," said Mrs. Balfour.

"Then accompany me please, for my men will be here soon to look after your vehicle," and he led the way into the manor grounds.

Both Mrs. Balfour and her daughter gazed with admiration upon the lovely home, looming up before them like an old castle, and at the perfectly kept grounds.

They saw the yacht lying at anchor in the cove, and stripped to meet the storm, and the beautiful flower gardens and extensive out-buildings in the rear.

"I may say to you, Mrs. Balfour, that I keep bachelor's hall, but you will be none the less welcome, I assure you," said Morency, as they neared the home.

"Then you are not married?" said the lady.

"No, I am not so fortunate."

"And your family?"

"I am alone in the world, madam, for I have no near kindred," and he spoke in a tone of sadness.

They were now at the house, and were ushered into the large parlors, while the housekeeper was called to show them to their rooms.

Both Mrs. Balfour and her daughter seemed charmed with the beautiful house and gazed from the windows of their charming rooms with delight.

Soon they joined their host upon the piazza, and together they watched the coming up of the storm.

"I am glad to tell you, Mrs. Balfour, that an old wheel we had in the shop just suited your carriage, and you can go on your way in the morning, though I would be charmed to have you as my guests as long as you please to remain; but you said that you were anxious to go on."

"Yes; and you are most kind, Mr. Morency, to entertain us; but we are in a hurry to get on our way, and but for the storm would have to continue our journey to-night."

The storm now burst with great violence, driving them into the house, and as her mother talked to their host Miss Balfour stood at the window gazing out into the tempest.

She saw the yacht riding gracefully on the waves, and tugging at her anchor as though anxious to fly away, while beyond the Sound was lashed into foam.

The stately trees bent before the force of the gale; and thunder and lightning were incessant.

Whatever was in her thoughts, Miss Balfour's face looked sad and fretted.

At last she turned from the window, when darkness shut out the scene, and strolling to the piano ran her fingers over the keys.

Instantly Almont Morency was at her side.

"Play for me, please," he said, in a low tone, that was very winning.

She did so, and she played well.

"After dinner I will ask you to sing for me; but now Corks announces dinner."

And he offered an arm to Mrs. Balfour and led the way to the dining-room.

"May I ask you to preside, madam?" he said, courteously.

And Miss Balfour was placed upon his right hand.

Corks, having the honor of ladies to dinner, had excelled himself, and the table was all that could be desired, the dinner a most tempting one.

The different courses and wines were served as though it were a large dinner-party, and both mother and daughter came to the conclusion that the master of Morency Manor was a very rich man, and a most fascinating one as well.

During the evening Miss Balfour and Morency sung duets together, and when the ladies retired to their rooms, there was a strange expression upon the face of the young lady.

The next morning they awoke to find the storm still raging, the rain descending in torrents.

"Mr. Morency says that you must not think of going to-day, for the streams are flooded and it would be dangerous," said the maid who awoke Miss Balfour.

That young lady quite agreed with the master of the manor, and so the day was passed and another night at Morency Manor.

The next morning was clear and beautiful, and after breakfast Almont Morency bade his guests farewell.

"Strange, they told me nothing about themselves, and I know not where they are from."

"Nor did they ask me to visit them," muttered Almont Morency, as they drove away.

Then he walked down to the cove and called a boat ashore from his yacht, to go out and see how she had ridden out the storm.

He found all on board shipshape, and throwing himself in an easy-chair in the cabin, picked up a book and began to read.

Thus he continued for a couple of hours, and going ashore took a walk through the grounds.

Returning to the house for lunch, the housekeeper said:

"I was looking for you, sir, for though I suppose it was all right, I thought I'd tell you."

"Tell me what, Mrs. Gretchen?"

"About the elderly lady, sir."

"Well, what about her?"

"You said, sir, as how I might read any books in your library, and being nervous with the storm, I came down in the night to get one, as I could not sleep."

"Well, well?"

"And, sir, I saw the elderly lady with a small dark-lantern in her hand, coming out of the library."

"She saw me and said as how she could not sleep with the storm, and had come down for a book to read."

"But it bothered me, sir, as I don't see why she brought a dark lantern, for we have none in the house, and she dropped a bunch of strange-looking keys as she spoke, and she had no book but a small tin box."

"By Heaven! have I had more robbers in my house?" and Almont Morency ran into the library, secured his keys and opened the safe there, while he said:

"Thank Heaven, I have no valuables here now."

"Ha! these papers have been overhauled, and—by Heaven—the tin box is gone!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STRANGE CONTROVERSY.

"How far is it your intention to run up the coast, sir?" asked Dick Reeves, the gambler, of the Unknown Law-Breaker, as the *Puzzle* was running out of the harbor toward the open sea.

"The captain says, sir, that he knows a nice little island, the very place for the work we have on hand, so we can retire," was the reply.

The gambler and the Cuban then turned in, the latter anxious to get what rest he could and steady his nerves for the ordeal on the morrow, though with perfect confidence in himself he had no dread of the result, he said to his second.

Soon after the man who had, in the pretended letter from the Unknown Chief, called himself Captain Nameless, also turned in for the balance of the night.

They were awakened at eight o'clock to have breakfast, and a very tempting meal was set before them, and they sat down to it together, with Skipper Dorcas at the head of the table.

Captain Nameless, as we will call him on this cruise, was coldly polite to the others, but talked pleasantly with the skipper.

After the meal they all went on deck, Dick Reeves and Señor Alferro expecting to find the vessel nearing the island, and their surprise was great, indeed, when they discovered that land was not in sight.

"What does this mean, sir?" sternly asked Gambler Reeves of the skipper.

"What does what mean, sir?" was the cool reply of Dorcas.

"Where is that island?"

"Some distance down the coast, sir."

"When will we get there?"

"Some time to-morrow night, I hope."

"To-morrow night?" almost yelled the gambler.

"Yes, if this good breeze holds good, for it is in our favor, and we are driving along very fast."

"There is some deviltry here, and I wish to know what it means?" angrily said Dick Reeves.

"It means, gentlemen, that as I am a second in this duel, and have the choice of ground, I do not intend to get myself into trouble by having it occur where we can all be arrested, so I shall run to an island I have in my mind, and there you can fight it out."

"But it will take days to get back, and I am needed at my business," urged Reeves.

"Well, if you wish to fight, you have got to go where I take you to do it," was the calm reply.

"Curses!" came from between the teeth of Dick Reeves, and he walked apart with Señor Alferro, who seemed to be really anxious.

"Do you suspect treachery, Alferro?" he asked.

"I think not, but it is a strange proceeding."

"Suppose you ask that man about it," and he referred to Captain Nameless.

"Does not this strike you as being a very strange act, sir, on the part of the skipper of this craft?" asked Dick Reeves.

"You mean in taking us so far away?"

"I do."

"He does not wish to get into trouble, he says."

"Well, let us force him to return."

"Why should we?"

"Neither Señor Alferro or myself can spare the time, for it will be over a week before we can return, even with favorable breezes."

"I thought this duel was to be to the death, sir."

"And so it is."

"Then some one of us will not return," was the significant reply of Captain Nameless.

"It will doubtless be; but I would give up the duel before I would go so far."

"It is worth a great deal to me to be at my rooms," said the gambler.

"Doubtless," was the dry reply.

Then Dick Reeves went again to Señor Alferro and had another talk, after which he returned to Captain Nameless and said:

"My principal and myself, sir, have had a talk, and if you withdraw your charge of his having cheated you we will put back to the city and declare the duel off."

"I refuse to withdraw it, sir."

"Then let us force this skipper to head for the nearest land, and have it out there."

"Force him?"

"Yes."

"We are but three, and he has six others on board besides himself."

"True; but he will not dare stand on, if we demand that he land us."

"Ask him."

This Dick Reeves did, and Dorcas replied:

"If this duel is to be fought, it shall be on ground of my choosing, for I have no intention to get myself into trouble."

Then the gambler again had a talk with Señor Alferro.

It could be seen that they were very earnest in what they said, and at last the Cuban yielded to what the gambler urged.

Returning to Captain Nameless he said:

"We have decided, sir, not to fight this duel, so let the matter end as it is."

"Your friend is a coward, then?" sneered Captain Nameless.

"He is no coward, and insults will do no good now, for we have determined not to fight."

"Well, sir, I have something to say in this, and fight you shall, for I have not been forced into this affair for nothing," sternly remarked Captain Nameless.

"What! do you refuse to let us withdraw from our position?"

"I certainly do."

"Are you in league with this skipper against us?"

"To the extent of his having chosen the ground we go there to fight."

"I called your friend a thief, and I shall punish him, if in my power, for cheating me."

"He challenged me, I accepted, and the duel shall take place."

"That is so, for I have not come on a wild-goose chase for nothing," replied Skipper Dorcas.

Again did Dick Reeves return to the Cuban.

What passed between them could not be heard by the others, but the gambler and Señor Alferro both came aft, and the former said:

"Captain Dorcas, if you don't put this vessel about I will see that you never enter the port of Boston again; yes, and I will have you arrested as a kidnapper, for my friend and myself have been kidnapped by you, that is certain."

The skipper laughed and replied:

"You both came on board this vessel, and I was to seek a safe spot where a duel could be fought that you set sail on my vessel."

"Now, I have my orders, and I intend to obey them."

"Your orders?"

"Yes."

"From whom?"

"That gentleman there," was the cool reply, and he pointed to Captain Nameless.

CHAPTER XXX.

POINT TO POINT.

THE two men, Dick Reeves and Señor Alferro, looked almost alarmed at the remark of Skipper Dorcas, who told them that he had his orders from Captain Nameless.

"What does this outrage mean, sir?" angrily said the gambler, turning upon the calm man near him.

"Just what Captain Dorcas says."

"He is in your pay then?"

"He is my second."

"And you have entrapped us?"

"Oh, no, I am simply determined, as the challenged party, to have this duel come off, so calm yourselves, gentlemen, and keep cool for the rest of the voyage, as our destination is the island which Captain Dorcas has in his mind, and it will do you no good to fret and curse about it."

"As it is, let us enjoy the voyage."

Dick Reeves's long career as a gambler had caused him to learn self-control, and, seeing that whatever was to be the result they were in for it, and helpless he said:

"All right, when a thing must be done, I face it, and there's an end of it."

The gambler and the Cuban then had another talk, and afterward quietly submitted to the alternative.

The Puzzle meanwhile was dashing swiftly along upon her course.

The wind was fresh, the sea smooth, and with

a cloud of canvas set she was making ten knots easily.

She was a very trim, a very pretty craft, with ample cabin room, and Skipper Dorcas was a good liver and had an excellent cook on board in the shape of a Virginia negro whom he had rescued from a cruel master.

The six men in the crew were well disciplined, perfect sailors and enjoyed themselves forward as best suited them.

It was on the morning of the third day out that the helmsman sighted land, and when the three passengers came on deck after breakfast, they were quite near an island of considerable size, with bold and rocky shores.

As they gazed at it there was a man seen to step out upon a cliff and then set up a pole with several flags upon it.

"Why, the island is inhabited!" cried Dick Reeves, excitedly.

"Yes; there is a fisherman and his wife upon it, those are all," announced the skipper.

"But what do those signals mean?"

"Simply an invitation to call, for he is a friend of mine, and wants to send for some stores by me, doubtless."

The gambler seemed relieved, and the Cuban breathed more freely.

"Where do you land, skipper?" asked Captain Nameless.

"We round the island, sir, and run into a small cove, as neat an anchorage as any craft would wish."

All now watched the island closely and saw that it was a wild and rugged spot for a home.

It was far from the mainland, and its cliffs and ridges were covered with pines and cedars.

As they rounded the point they saw that the channel was not an easy one to keep, for there was a strong current running, and sunken rocks and a reef here and there were visible where the waters dashed upon them.

But Skipper Dorcas was an able pilot, for he ran the Puzzle safely into the cove, and a boat was lowered and sent ashore containing the skipper and his three passengers.

As they landed they were met by Caspar Carr, who looked surprised to see that Skipper Dorcas brought visitors, and he also turned slightly pale.

But the skipper said:

"I have brought some visitors with me, friend Carr, but they will not remain long; at least, not all of them, as they have merely come to fight a duel on your island, where they would be beyond the reach of the law."

"A duel?"

And Caspar Carr seemed to feel that there was something back of the skipper's words.

"Yes, my man, a duel, brought on by my accusing that gentleman of cheating me at cards, and he wishing to kill me for the accusation challenged me."

"Do you know a good spot?"

It was Captain Nameless who spoke and Caspar Carr replied politely:

"Oh, yes, sir, I know the very spot."

"It's over yonder where I buried some folks that came ashore here one night in a wreck."

"Will you go now, gentlemen, or wait until you get steady after your voyage?"

"Just as these gentlemen say," and Captain Nameless turned to Dick Reeves and the Cuban.

"Let us have it over with, for I am anxious to get back to the city," said the gambler.

With Caspar Carr leading the way the party walked toward the interior of the island, Coal, the negro cook of the Puzzle, following with the weapons.

As they went along they saw Ruth Carr standing in the cabin door watching them with wonder in her face.

At last they reached a little opening in the timber, near the sea-shore, and there were visible half a dozen graves with no headboards.

It was a dreary spot, the very place for a tragedy to occur, and Caspar Carr pointed to it with seeming pride at his selection.

"My man, have you such a thing as a spade?" asked Captain Nameless, and the question made all shudder.

"Yes, sir, a couple of them."

"You will need them, so please go after them, as there will be some grave-digging to do."

Caspar Carr glanced into the face of the man, who spoke so calmly about digging a grave which he might fill, and the look he saw there convinced him that the one who was to face him in a deadly combat had a dangerous foe.

He at once hurried away to his cabin for the spades, and Skipper Dorcas and Dick Reeves began to arrange the preliminaries for the duel.

The Cuban had brought with him a handsome pair of rapiers, which the gambler offered Dorcas the choice of.

"Her, mate, I don't know anything about a sword," he said.

And Captain Nameless stepped forward, took one of the weapons, tested its temper, felt of its point, and said, curtly:

"This will do, for the weapons are fine ones, indeed."

The toss for positions was won by the gambler for his man, and he placed him with his back to the sun.

This seemed not to trouble Captain Nameless in the least, who cast aside his coat and took his position, just as Caspar Carr returned with a spade and shovel.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" asked the gambler, who had won the word.

"Yes; as soon as I say to Señor Alferro that I know him as Don Alferro, the Cuban swordsman, who found gambling lucrative where he could cheat with marked cards, and so gave up teaching fencing to indulge in it," said Captain Nameless.

"And knowing me as a champion swordsman you dare to face me?" the Cuban hissed forth, with savage earnestness.

"Oh, yes; for though I never gave fencing-lessons, I am something of a swordsman myself, and I tell you, Don Alferro, I intend to kill you."

The calm confidence of the man blanched the face of Dick Reeves, but the Cuban knew his skill and smiled confidently as he said:

"Cross blades, señor, for the death-struggle."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A HOT PURSUIT.

WHEN the discovery was made by Almont Morency that for another time his library safe had been robbed, he was naturally very much enraged.

He had moved all valuables to his new safe in his bedroom, and yet, from some strange motive, had left his tin box containing important personal papers in the library desk-safe.

Why he had done so he could not understand; but he had not expected a call from another burglar, and besides, had not expected them, if they did come again, to steal what was simply a box of old papers.

Alarmed at the discovery, he at once ordered his horse, and several servants to mount also and accompany him in the pursuit of the robbers, who he now felt confident were none other than Mrs. Balfour and her daughter.

But for the story of the housekeeper he would never have suspected them.

But the fact that Mrs. Balfour had been seen in the library at night, and with a dark-lantern, while she also carried a tin box and let a bunch of strange-looking keys fall, seemed proof positive that she was the thief.

So out of the gate dashed the master of Morency Manor, followed by two mounted servants.

He rode to the village and there secured the services of a constable and rode on rapidly to the Bostwick Farm.

The owner of Bostwick Farm was an old gentleman, known and respected by the whole community, and he called out as the party rode up:

"Ah, Morency, glad to see you, and you also, Constable Craig."

"Dismount and come in."

This the two did, and Almont Morency said:

"Mr. Bostwick, I have come to see some guests of yours, who came to-day."

"I refer to Mrs. Balfour and her daughter."

"I have no one with me, Morency, other than my family, and I never heard of the lady you refer to."

"Can this be true, sir?"

"Surely, Mr. Morency, you would not doubt my word?"

"I beg pardon, Mr. Bostwick, but the truth is day before yesterday a carriage broke down on the highway near my gate, and it contained a coachman and two ladies."

"I invited the latter to my home, and they introduced themselves as Mrs. Balfour and her daughter, and they said they were coming to visit you."

"I never heard of them."

"Well, sir, as it stormed all of yesterday, you know, I held them over until this morning, when an old wheel I had fitted their carriage and they took their leave, coming, as I supposed, to your house."

"I walked about the grounds, went on board my yacht, and only after some hours returned to the house, and then my housekeeper told me that she could not sleep for the storm, and going to the library for a book had met Mrs. Balfour, who also said that she had gone after something to read."

"But the lady had a tin box in her hand, a dark lantern and a bunch of peculiar keys, and I at once discovered that my library safe had been robbed of a box containing important papers."

"Naturally I came at once here."

"You did right under the circumstances, Mr. Morency, and I give you my sympathy, for this is the third time you have been robbed, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And yet I am glad there was no murder, as in the first case; but you must find these women, for they certainly were the thieves."

"Assuredly, sir, for the box was in the safe the very day of their arrival."

"They were professionals from the city without doubt, and used my name as a cat's-paw."

"But the city is the place to look for them, certainly."

"Without doubt, sir."

"Did you observe in leaving your home which way the carriage-wheels turned from your gate?" asked Constable Craig.

"By Jupiter! but I never thought of that."

"In fact, I came by a path through the farm in my haste to get here."

"Then we will go back and take their trail," said the constable.

"Success to you, gentlemen," called out Farmer Postwick, as they rode off.

It was a distance of ten miles back to the Morency Farm: but horse-flesh was not spared and at last they reached the gate.

There the wheel-tracks were plainly seen in the sand, and they turned toward the city.

"Here, Luke, dash off to the village with this telegram."

And Almont Morency hastily wrote a dispatch to the chief of police at Brooklyn:

"Detain closed carriage, with two ladies, one old, other young, until arrival of self and officer."

"Carriage has one red wheel behind, two bay horses, and driver with red hair and beard."

"Should arrive soon."

"Also wire Williamsburg Ferry."

Then going to the house Almont Morency and the officer mounted fresh horses and set off for town at full speed.

But upon arrival late in the evening they found the carriage there, and the driver said that the ladies had dismissed him at Flushing, intending to drive over after dinner to Whitestone and take the boat to the city.

"Where are you from?" asked the police officer.

"The Waverly Stables, sir, in New York."

"Who employed you?"

"Two ladies came in, sir, and asked the boss for a team for several days."

"Did they pay him?"

"Yes, sir, they gave him fifty dollars for the job, whether it took three or four days."

"You know nothing about them?"

"No, sir."

"And the boss?"

"I guess he don't, for he did not even take their names and address, as he got their money."

"Did you hear any conversation between them after leaving?"

"No, sir, no more than after they left that gentleman's house, they said they were glad they would not have to go further, and told me to drive back to the city by way of Flushing, and not to spare my horses."

"This looks like a correct story, Mr. Morency, but I will send an officer to the stables with the man to verify it, and also to see if the parties arrived on the boat, for it has come in before this."

"Pray do so, and leave no stone unturned to ferret them out and I will pay all expenses, and a liberal reward for the return of the box," and Almont Morency returned slowly homeward, going by the way of Flushing.

There he learned that the ladies had stopped for dinner and taken a carriage for Whitestone.

Remaining at the hotel all night, Morency and the constable went on to Whitestone the next morning, and ascertained that the ladies had taken the boat to New York.

Arriving at home he found a messenger had just arrived from the chief of police.

He reported that the ladies had arrived on the boat and had taken a hack up-town, dismissing the driver at Union Square, and there all trace was lost.

At the stables nothing was known of the two ladies, as the driver had said.

"Tell your chief I will give ten thousand dollars for the return of that tin box and the papers as they were when taken," said Almont Morency.

And the messenger went back in haste to report this generous offer to the chief of police, while Almont Morency was forced to contain himself in patience as best he could and hope for the return of the missing box of mysterious papers, for mystery there was about them.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE STOLEN BOX.

The white-haired chief of the Secret Service League sat alone in his comfortable room looking over a number of papers, letters and telegrams which had accumulated in the past few days while he had been absent on some special business.

The door opening, admitted Lomax, his lieutenant, who said:

"Glad to see you back, chief, and hope your trip was successful?"

"Yes, in part, for it recalled scenes and incidents in my mind, and that is what I wanted."

"By the way, you have looked over these telegrams and letters from our people?"

"In part, sir, as you told me, though some marked 'Personal' I left for you."

"There is nothing that you cannot open that comes here to me, Lomax, for this is no half-confidence between us."

"I see that reports come in slowly, for little has been done."

"Not much, sir; but I am glad to see that our spies have found no traitors among our detectives."

"Yes, that is a good thing; but I hardly expected it when I looked into the faces of your pick of men."

"You are a good reader of human nature, Lomax."

"Thank you, sir; but, chief, you are spending a large sum of money to gain your ends, for your expenses, all told, must be at least ten thousand dollars a month."

"The game is worth the candle," was the grim reply of the chief.

Then Lomax said:

"Your Lady Detectives have twice been here to see you."

"Ah! Mrs. Balfour and her daughter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did they make any report?"

"None, sir, other than to say that they would await your return."

"Did Mrs. Balfour carry a parcel?"

"Now I think of it, sir, she did."

"She certainly was most anxious for your return."

Just then Dolph, the valet of the detective chief, entered the room and handed to his master a card.

"Ah! it is Mrs. Balfour now."

"Show her up at once, Dolph."

Lomax arose, and, as his chief did not detain him, he departed, saying that he would call again in a couple of hours.

A moment after a lady deeply veiled entered the room.

Throwing back her veil she revealed the face of Mrs. Balfour, the guest of Almont Morency for two nights.

"Why, madam, how pale you are!"

"Has aught occurred to alarm you?" said the chief, as he saw that the lady was visibly affected from some cause.

"Oh, sir! I got the box, but I have been robbed of it!"

The chief, in spite of his perfect self-control, sprung to his feet.

"Robbed of it, madam?"

"Yes, sir, my house was broken into last night, and I was robbed of the box, and strange to say, nothing else; but my daughter raised the alarm and the burglar was frightened off before he took other things."

"Where did you keep this box, madam?" asked the chief, now perfectly calm again.

"In the top drawer of my dressing-case."

"And the key?"

"Was about my neck; but the robber used false keys, for here they are, as he dropped them on the floor."

"Did you see the man?"

"No, sir, for I slept very soundly; but my daughter did."

"Did she describe him?"

"I asked her, and she said she only saw some one at the dressing-case, with the box in hand, and then she gave the alarm."

"The door of our rooms was open, and also the one outside leading into the street."

"I will send an advertisement to the papers, offering ten thousand dollars reward for the return of a tin box, containing only valuable papers, stolen from Mrs. Louise Ashton—"

"Mrs. Jennie Balfour, sir."

"Pardon me, madam, but the loss of this box, stolen from Morency Manor, may have been reported to the police, and doubtless has been by its owner."

"Now if my advertisement says Mrs. Balfour, the name you went to Morency Manor under, you will be visited by a detective, Mr. Morency will see you, and recognize in you the—pardon me—the thief."

"That will end all."

"But if I say Mrs. Louise Ashton, and place that lady and her daughter in your rooms, why the result will be she will not be found out as the one who got the box from the manor."

"Oh, sir! what a wonderful head you have," said Mrs. Balfour in admiration.

"Thank you; but now let me send this advertisement off, and to every paper in the city, and then I will hear what you have to say of your trip; I half believe this box was taken by some one in the pay of Morency, for a reward, and in that case we have our work to do over again to get possession of it."

"Then you are not angry with me, sir?"

"Not at all, for accidents cannot be helped, and I have heard that you came several times to see me with the box, while I was absent."

"I did, sir."

The advertisements were now written and dispatched by a messenger, and turning to the detective, the chief said:

"You got into the manor then without trouble?"

"Oh, yes, sir, for your plan to break down at the gate was perfectly successful."

"And my Secret Service man, who is acting as a driver at the stables, behaved well?"

"Perfectly, sir, and as you suggested, we left him to come on alone from Flushing, while we came by the boat from Whitestone, thus covering up our tracks from pursuit."

"And you got into the library without trouble at night?"

"Yes, sir, but unfortunately met the house-keeper, who had gone in after a book."

"I told her that the storm kept me awake, and that I had come for a book I had been reading."

"The first night Mr. Morency sat up so late in the library I dared not attempt it, so made up my mind to play sick during the day, and thus remain over; but it stormed so I did not have to feign sickness to stay until another day."

"Mr. Morency is a most pleasant gentleman, sir."

"Yes, a very fascinating man, and I fear your daughter would never have had the heart to plot against him."

"Eleanor is a strange girl, sir, and did not even express an opinion regarding him."

"Well, Mrs. Balfour, I thank you, and I hope you will hold yourself in readiness for other work when needed."

"Now, go home, please, and allow Mrs. Ashton and her daughter to become mistresses of your little home for a few days."

"I will send them to you, and when you go take your servant with you."

"I will, sir, and I will be glad of a few days' rest, while my daughter wishes to leave town awhile to visit an old schoolmate," and Mrs. Balfour took her departure.

Instantly the chief touched a bell, and from an outer room a man appeared.

"Follow that lady in black for the next week and report her actions."

"If you need help send to me for a helper."

"Yes, chief," and the man disappeared.

Again a touch on the bell brought another man.

"Go to this address and ask Mrs. Ashton and her niece to come here at once."

The man departed and the chief was again alone.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SECRET MARRIAGE.

SOME ten days after the visit of Almont Morency to The Pines when he confessed his love for its fair mistress he again unexpectedly appeared upon the scene.

His coming as he had before had been a great surprise to Celeste, and a joy as well, short though his stay was.

It told her that she was loved by the man whom she idolized, the man whom she had utterly lost forever.

She had held in her heart the deepest grief, hiding it as well as she could from Mrs. Evans, when she believed that Almont Morency loved her school-girl rival, and now her rival in her heart's first love.

She had felt that Lulu Vance had taken underhand means to win Morency from her, and but for their meeting as they had she would have been his wife.

In the midst of her grief he had come to her and asked for her love.

Then, too, he had told her he had not breathed one word of love to Lulu Vance nor asked her to be his wife.

This made Celeste Vivian the happiest of women, and when she saw him depart it was with gladness in her heart.

A strange request he had made of her, however, and that was that she should not make her betrothal to him known, even to Mrs. Evans.

She loved him too dearly to question, and obeyed.

Then, one afternoon, as she sat in the little arbor where she had heard him tell her he loved her, she was dreaming only of joy in the future, and, in her noble heart, she felt a pang of sorrow for Lulu Vance, who she knew must suffer when she knew all.

Suddenly a shadow fell upon her, and with a cry of joy she started to her feet, for Almont Morency stood before her.

"How did you come?" she queried, eagerly.

"I drove up from the station," he answered.

"How good of you to come to see me so soon again."

"I have come to have a talk with you, and a serious one, my darling."

"Has anything terrible happened?" and Celeste thought of Lulu Vance.

"Nothing at all, so do not be alarmed: but I wish to tell you something, and see if you love me enough to do as I ask?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, let me tell you that my father intended that I should wed a certain young lady; whom I hardly know, and whom I care nothing about."

"Now this lady's father has it in his power to cut me out of my fortune if I wed another—"

"I have a fortune, Almont, even larger than yours is said to be."

"True, Celeste, but I am not one to marry for money."

"But the fortune is my own, and for a whim of my father, and that of the father of the lady in question, I see no reason why all I possess should be given to charity and I left a beggar, as it was."

"But there is a clause in the will which they have overlooked, and that is to the effect that should she not be my wife when she is twenty-one years of age, and I then refuse to marry her, the will in my favor holds good."

"Now she is not yet twenty, and more, she loves a young man devotedly, as he does her."

"He is poor, only a clerk, but tells her that within a year or two he can promise to give her a home and a handsome support, and she promises then to become his wife."

"Now I am secretly helping this young man on in a business way, and he is doing splendidly."

"Before I met you, I was content to marry her; but now I would not commit such a sacrilege on love."

"When she marries this man, I am free; but I do not wish to wait for a year and a half to claim you, and I beg that you will secretly marry me."

"You have formed few friendships here, you can send Mrs. Evans back to England, where she has been anxious to go, giving her a handsome little gift in money, and we can be secretly married, and soon after take a vessel for Europe, seek some quiet place in Italy, or Switzerland, and there live in happiness until this intended of mine marries, when I am freed from the claim on me in the will, and returning to America we can make known our marriage and dwell either at Morency Manor, or The Pines."

"As for yourself, you can give out that you are going elsewhere to live, and can sell The Pines, if you wish, rent it or close it up, for you are your own mistress."

"Now, Celeste, do you think the less of me for telling you what I have, and for wishing to claim you as my wife at once?"

Celeste was bewildered by all that she had heard, and she felt that she did not see the situation of affairs with perfect clearness.

But Almont Morency went over the story again, and at last convinced her that his plan was not a wrong one, and loving him she yielded and said:

"Yes, Almont, I am my own mistress, and I will marry you—secretly."

"Only I wish that I could keep dear Mrs. Evans with us."

"I will more than take her place in your heart, Celeste, and as it is I am jealous of the love you feel for her."

"Very well, I will let her go, for she has two children in England, and she longs to see them, I know."

"She only came over here to act as governess in a family, because the pay was large, and soon after the two children in the family died, and Mr. Rollins secured her for me."

"Can I not even tell him?"

"Your lawyer?"

"No, indeed, for there is no reason why you should."

"None at all, as all I have I am mistress of in my own name."

Thus did Almont Morency win his bride, for soon after Mrs. Evans was told that Celeste no longer needed her, and she was sent off happy in a handsome present of a few thousand dollars and all expenses paid to her home.

If the shrewd, good lady suspected any underhand work, she felt convinced that Celeste would act only for the best.

Then The Pines was left in charge of a servant and offered for sale, and its beautiful mistress was secretly married to Almont Morency, and the next steamer carried them to Europe, a note having been left by the young bride for Rolland Rollins, Esq., telling him simply that she had decided to travel abroad for awhile, and regretted not seeing him to say good-by.

Of course Mr. Rollins supposed that she was accompanied by Mrs. Evans, and Lulu Vance, hearing of her departure, smiled with triumph, as she muttered:

"She felt her struggle against me was hopeless."

"Now I shall win the game I am so desperately playing."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DUEL ON THE ISLAND.

DON ALFERRO the Cuban swordsman, and Captain Nameless, the Unknown Law-Breaker, were face to face, their blades raised for the fray, and looking at them with deepest interest were Skipper Dorcas, Dick Reeves the gambler, Caspar Carr the islander, his wife hiding some distance away and peering at the scene, and Coal the negro cook of the Puzzle.

The Cuban was enraged at the words of his enemy, there was no doubt of that, and yet Captain Nameless was perfectly calm, in fact almost indifferent.

His coolness in fact almost disconcerted Dick Reeves, who muttered:

"Can the Don have caught a Tartar?"

With a rapid salute the combatants crossed blades, and the clash rung out ominously through the pine woods.

The moment the blades met, Don Alferro made a quick lunge, and was surprised to find that it was taken off "in semicircle."

He tried a thrust and it was also parried most skillfully.

But this enraged the Cuban only the more, for he had intended running his rival through at once and thus end the affair.

Failing in this he tried every lunge, thrust

and attack known to him, but all in vain, for Captain Nameless defended himself with consummate skill.

Not once had the point of the Cuban's sword touched him.

"He's great in defense," muttered Don Alferro; "but wait until I tire him out, for my sinews are of steel."

But instead the Cuban seemed to be the first one to grow weary.

His face blanched, for so consummately well did Captain Nameless defend himself, and so easily, that he found that he was doing all the hard work.

Not once had the man of mystery made a lunge or a thrust at his enemy.

He seemed only satisfied with defending himself.

This was cheering to Don Alferro, who was sure of killing him should he begin to attack.

At length, by mutual consent, the two men lowered their sword-points, stepped back and gazed at each other.

The Cuban's face had a pallor upon it, which even the heat of the combat had not driven off.

He glanced anxiously toward Dick Reeves, and the gambler gave him what sympathy he could in a look.

The Cuban was showing signs of fatigue, and the short rest was a great help to him.

As for Captain Nameless, he hardly breathed more quickly than before the contest began.

A minute of rest, and Don Alferro felt like a new man.

He grasped his sword-hilt more firmly, set his teeth, and the glance of a Nemesis came into his eyes.

He had been the wonder of Cuba, of Spain, France and America as a swordsman.

Not a scar did he bear where the point of any man's sword had touched him.

He had fought many duels, in many had disarmed his enemy and been merciful, but in others he had been merciless, and had thrust his blade into the hearts of half a score of men.

He had made a handsome living, but he was extravagant, luxurious in his tastes, and his money went freely.

Then he had come to America and given lessons, recuperated his fortunes in part, and, meeting Richard Reeves, gentleman gambler, had given up teaching how to kill and had taken to gambling.

So matters stood when he had met Captain Nameless in the gilded *salon* of Dick Reeves.

Now he was at bay, for he was forced to fight.

That he would find a foe worthy of his steel he had not for a moment thought.

Thus far he had taken a lesson, for the teacher was being taught, at least in the art of self-defense.

So it was that he decided that he would surely kill his foe when their blades crossed again.

And again they crossed.

From that instant the Cuban had another surprise.

The Man of Mystery no longer acted upon the defensive.

He was the attacking party.

And Don Alferro had all he could do to defend himself.

Skipper Dorcas was surprised, and Dick Reeves showed that he was anxious now.

As for Caspar Carr he smiled grimly, and Coal looked on with eyes as large as saucers with wonder.

The movements of the combatants were now more rapid than before.

The thrusts and lunges of Captain Nameless were like flashes of lightning, they were so quick.

At last Captain Nameless began to force his victim backward.

The Cuban was giving ground, and all could see that he had all he could do to defend himself.

Step by step he went backward.

Step by step Captain Nameless forced him.

At last the Cuban felt an obstruction behind him.

It was the grave of one of the wrecked unfortunates whom Caspar Carr had buried, and it was a suggestive and ominous halting-place.

Perhaps he felt this as his adversary said grimly:

"Retreat no further, Don Alferro, for there is a grave behind you."

Was it kindness, this suggestion, fearing that he would fall over the grave?

It did not appear so to the Cuban, for he became the very hue of a corpse.

Another quick thrust, a desperate parry, a lunge, and with terrific fervor, and the blade of Captain Nameless went through the body of the Cuban.

A stifled cry broke from his lips, and a curse came from the lips of Dick Reeves.

But Captain Nameless withdrew his sword quickly, and catching his foe laid him gently down upon the ground.

"You have killed him, curses upon you!" hissed forth Dick Reeves the gambler.

As he spoke, he knelt by the side of the dying man.

"Speak, Alferro, speak if you can, for you have your death-wound," said the gambler.

"Yes, he has killed me—a wonderful—swordsman—a perfect devil—with a—blade!"

They were his last words, for Don Alferro's head fell back and he was dead.

"Curses!" came in a savage tone from Dick Reeves.

"Now, Richard Reeves, it is your turn, for I came here to fight you, too," and Captain Nameless confronted the amazed gambler.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A FAIR DETECTIVE.

It was a bitter disappointment to Almont Morency that he could not trace the two women who had so cleverly robbed him of the tin box of papers.

He had offered the chief of police a reward of ten thousand dollars for its return intact, and this naturally stimulated the detectives to make a thorough search for it.

Some days after the robbery, Almont Morency was seated alone in his library.

His face did not wear a happy look, for he felt deeply the loss of his papers.

"I have some foe on my track who is doing this."

"But who can he be, I wonder?"

"How did he know of the existence of those papers?"

"I must ferret this out, for it is beginning to fret me more than I could wish."

So he mused, and he started as he heard wheels on the carriage drive.

He received few visitors, so who could it be? A moment after, Corks put his head in the door and said:

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

"Ask him in."

Thinking it was some one about the tin box, Almont Morency became interested, and turned as his visitor entered.

He saw a young man, with short black curls falling upon his shoulders, and who had the appearance of a gentleman, though he was scarcely out of his teens.

He was well-dressed, wore an overcoat, for the day was chilly, and a silk scarf about his neck.

"Mr. Morency?" he said, with a bow.

"Yes, sir; may I ask who I have the honor of addressing?"

"My name is of little consequence, sir, as I come to see you on a matter of business."

"Ah! be seated, please."

The young man placed a sachel he carried by a chair, and took a seat a little in the back-ground.

Throwing himself into his own easy-chair, Almont Morency asked:

"Now, sir, how can I serve you?"

"You have offered a large reward for a box that was stolen from you some time since, I believe?"

"For the contents of the box, sir; but do you know aught regarding it?"

"You esteem it very valuable?"

"I do."

"Yet it did not contain a treasure?"

"No, only letters of a most important nature to myself."

"And you are most anxious to get them?"

"I am."

"And will pay ten thousand dollars for them?"

"I will."

"Would you pay more?"

"I will."

"Would you give twice that sum for them?"

"If I had to, yes; but do you know anything about them?"

"I do."

"Are you a detective?"

"I am."

"You are rather young for a detective?"

"There are some children even in the Secret Service."

"And you know where these papers are?"

"I do."

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

"And can get them?"

"I can."

"And will?"

"Yes."

"When can you have them here?"

"Whenever you wish."

"Has the box been opened?"

"No, for there was no key."

"It was not broken open, then?"

"It was not."

"You have seen it?"

"I have."

"What is the writing on the box?"

"That in case of your death the box is to be burned unopened."

"That is true; but knowing how much I prize these papers, you wish to bleed me of twenty thousand dollars, a small fortune, in fact?"

"I asked to see if you valued them so highly."

"But you wish the sum?"

"I do not."

Almont Morency gazed at the strange youth for a moment and then said:

"Do you know who took that box?"

"Yes."
 "Who?"
 "Mrs. Balfour."
 "Why?"
 "She was in the pay of some one to do so."
 "How do you know this?"
 "I cannot tell."

"Well, I'll give you your price for the papers whenever you bring them."

"I have them with me now," and the youth opened the satchel he carried and placed the box upon the table before Morency.

The man seized it eagerly, glanced at the key-hole, and taking a key from his pocket opened the box.

There were the papers intact.

"You have done well, young man."

"How shall I make your check payable, and name the sum you demand?"

"I wish no sum, sir, nor will I accept a reward."

"Who gets it then?"

"No one."

"I do not understand you."

"There is the box, sir, so accept it from me."

"And who the deuce are you?" abruptly said Morency, completely mystified at what he heard.

"Mr. Morency," and the youth approached him, and spoke earnestly: "Will you hear my story?"

"Certainly, my lad, sit there and tell me what you have to say."

"I was born rich, but my father failed in business and left my mother and myself almost beggars."

"She accepted a position as a lady detective, which paid her well and enabled her to send me through boarding-school."

"See, I am no boy, but a woman, disguised in man's attire, and it was when at the academy of Madam Doremus five months ago, that you dashed into my room and saved my life."

"You were so gentle, so good to me, folded a blanket around me and saved me from a fearful death."

"Then you saved others, and when all would have thanked you, you were gone."

"I returned to my mother's little home in the city, and she obtained work for me in the Secret Service."

"Together we were sent on an errand, by the one in whose employ we are, and it was to this house."

"Our mission was to get those papers in that tin box, and we did so."

"I recognized you, the moment I saw you coming toward us in the highway, and yet my Secret Service training served me so well that I did not even tell my mother, nor does she know that you are the man who saved her daughter from death."

The disguised girl ceased speaking, and the man gazed at her in utter amazement at her disclosure.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A WOMAN'S GRATITUDE.

FOR some minutes after her confession to Almont Morency as to who she was neither Eleanor Balfour or the young man spoke.

He looked as though dazed, and then seemed to be trying to control some inward emotion.

And the fair detective had a blush upon her face, as though of shame at confessing her disguise.

At last Almont Morency asked:

"And you bring me this box back to repay me for saving your life?"

"I do."

"And ask no reward?"

"None."

"But you are poor?"

"I draw a good salary."

"As a detective?"

"Yes."

"It is not a life fitted to you."

"Yet I have been successful in my ventures."

"And your mother is also in the employ of a detective agency?"

"I did not say so."

"What then?"

"I said that we were in the pay of a certain person as detectives."

"But not an official agency?"

"I think not."

"You refuse to tell who your employer is?"

"I do."

"You cannot be bribed?"

Her eyes flashed forth and she replied:

"As I just refused twenty thousand dollars for that box, it should convince you that I cannot."

"Pardon me, for I should have said you cannot be urged to change your mind?"

"No, I am under oath to serve one party faithfully."

"And that party is my foe?"

"It would seem so."

"And sent you here to get this box?"

"Yes."

"Gave you full instructions?"

"Yes, it was his plot; but when I recognized you as my rescuer, I determined to serve you."

"And did so."

"I did not allow my mother to suspect who you were, for, though she would have wished to prove her gratitude, she yet was pledged to the service on honor."

"You were wise."

"I plotted all the time while here to help you, for I felt that you had foes plotting against you, and with those papers in their hands they might work your ruin."

"Who those foes are you know best—"

"Upon my honor I do not."

"You suspect no one?"

"No."

"You have wronged no one who may be seeking revenge?"

"No man lives whom I recall who could seek revenge upon me."

"Do you hold your fortune fairly?"

"By the will of my father."

"Does your holding it keep any one from it who may think he or she, as the case may be, has a claim upon it?"

"No one."

"Pardon me, but I am trying to help you."

"Accept full pardon," he said, with a smile.

"Then tell me, is there a woman in the case?"

"Ah!"

"There is one, then?"

"No, and my exclamation was that you suggested the thought."

"No, there is no woman in the case."

"Well, somehow you have a foe, and it may come to you some day who it is."

"I hope so."

"Now, Mr. Morency, I must depart, for—"

"Let me ask you to remain to lunch, at least."

"Thank you, I will do so, for I am not one to live on air."

Almont Morency rung the bell and ordered luncheon.

Then he asked:

"How did you come here?"

"I left by night, to help shield my disguise, though I believe it is perfect."

"I drove here in a buggy from the city."

"You are a brave woman."

"One in my profession must needs not be a coward."

"But you did not tell me how you got the papers."

Eleanor Balfour laughed lightly.

"I will tell you if you wish to know."

"Assuredly."

"The one we acted for was away when we returned, so we could not deliver the box to him, and would leave it with no one else."

"I had already substituted another box, a facsimile of that one, which I had made, and the writing put on it and papers of various kinds within."

"But as our chief was away I decided to rob my mother."

"So I hid the box, the real one, got up at night and took the bogus one out of her dressing-case drawer, and then cried out to her that there was some one in the room."

"I had opened both doors, and this gave truth to my assertion, and she was horrified at the robbery."

"Then she reported it to our chief, while I got rid of the bogus box, hid this one, and saying that I wished to visit an old schoolmate for a few days came here."

"Now you see, Mr. Morency, just how guilty I have been, for I aided and abetted in robbing you, and afterward robbed my mother."

And Eleanor Balfour again laughed.

"You are the very one for a detective; but Corks announces luncheon, so we will adjourn to the dining-room."

The fair detective seemed to greatly enjoy the repast, sipped a glass of wine, and then told Morency that she meant to start upon her return.

"And you will give me no hint as to who my enemy is?"

"I cannot break faith, and I have done only what my gratitude demanded, Mr. Morency."

"And, pardon me, but will you not allow me to prove my appreciation in some way?"

"You owe me nothing, sir, for the debt was on my side and still is."

"One moment! will you wear this as a souvenir of a good deed, and of a friend?"

He had drawn from his finger a magnificent diamond solitaire as he spoke, and slipped it up on her hand.

"Do you wish it?"

"I do."

"I will wear it, but not accept it as a gift."

"Some day you may get it back."

"I hope not; but will you not let me see you again?"

"No."

"Never?"

"Why should we meet again?"

"At least tell me where, if I needed your professional services in the future, I could find you?"

"Address simply to the New York Post Office."

"That is a boundless address."

"It is all the one that I can give you, sir."

"You know best, and again I thank you."

"Good-by, Mr. Morency," and she held out her hand, which he grasped warmly.

Then she drew on her overcoat and gloves, shoved her slouch hat down over her eyes and left the room, her horse and buggy being at the door.

"That's the handsomest young man I ever seen in these parts," said Corks to the hostler.

"And a generous one too, Mister Corks," answered Whip as he held up a dollar.

"Me rank is more lotty, Whip, as the master's butler, so he gave me two of 'em," and putting the money in his pocket Corks retired from the piazza, after a glance at the visitor who was sending his horse down the avenue at a lively pace.

And from the library window Almont Morency watched the fair detective's departure.

"A strange, beautiful woman that."

"And that academy fire?"

"Will it ever cross my path through life?"

"Now to destroy this hateful box, and—"

He seemed about to throw the box into the blazing fire, but changed his mind and going into his bedroom, hid it away in the new safe made in the wall.

Some strange impulse had forced him to still keep the box with its mysterious papers.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LULU VANCE BEGINS TO PLAY HER CARDS.

A SHORT while after the strange return of the tin box to Almont Morency, by Eleanor Balfour, the master of Morency Manor received in his mail one day a letter that somewhat surprised him.

He read it over twice, and a strange expression rested upon his face the while.

The letter was as follows:

"HOME, Nov. 30th, 18—.

"MY DEAR MR. MORENCY:—

"Now are you not surprised to receive a letter from me?"

"I hope you are not displeased at its reception, and will forgive my seeming boldness; but I wish to ask a favor of you."

"My father has lately been so successful in his speculations that he has more money than he knows what to do with, so told me I might purchase a seaside country seat just where I pleased."

"With this *carte blanche*, to do as I please, a thing most pleasing to my sex, I advertised for the kind of home I wished."

"The result was a mail that was most formidable in replies."

"I selected about a dozen of the best ones, and they range from Whitestone to Sag Harbor on Long Island, and New London to Stamford on the Connecticut shore."

"To visit these homes pleasantly, the idea struck me to get up an equestrian party for the trip."

"I have five couples, all well mounted, and we are to be accompanied by a spring wagon drawn by two horses, carrying a tent to be hastily put up in case of a rain, and with provisions for a lunch, two servants, and in fact all we may need."

"Our desire is to cross the ferry at Astoria, and visit the places coming in our way, and cross the Sound on the boat from Sag Harbor to New London."

"This route brings us by your home, and the favor I ask of you is to let us stop and make a call on you."

"It is needless to state, perhaps, that two of the couples are married, so that we will be fully supplied with chaperons."

"If you grant my request, please advise me at once by letter, as we wish to start on next Monday, so as to make the trip in a week."

"Papa joins me in kind regards."

"Sincerely your friend, LULU VANCE."

"P.S.—I saw Celeste in town shopping yesterday, and she was just as beautiful as ever."

"There is one house for forty thousand dollars not very far from Morency Manor that I like the description of best; but I don't wish to be a too near neighbor of yours."

Such was the letter, and when Morency had read it over twice, he rung a bell for a servant.

"Corks, order Dan to saddle a horse and be ready to go on a message for me."

Then he wrote two notes.

One was to a gentleman who owned the place referred to in Lulu's letter, and he made the special request that he would not dispose of his place to any one until he heard from him, and yet not to let his name be known in the affair.

The other was to Lulu Vance, and read:

"MY DEAR MISS VANCE:—

"I shall be so delighted by a visit from your friends and yourself, that I will be most happy to offer the hospitalities of Morency Manor for your stopping place the first night of your journey."

"My house has over forty rooms in it, so there will be ample space for all."

"If you will arrive early, I can give you an hour's sail on the sound in my yacht, and after dinner will try to entertain you in some way."

"Write me please if I am to expect you Monday next."

"Kindly present my regards to your father."

"Hoping soon to welcome you, with respect,"

"ALMONT MORENCY."

The following Monday morning dawned clear and cool, and having had a telegram from Lulu that the equestrians would arrive about one o'clock, Almont Morency mounted his thoroughbred Kentucky saddle-horse and rode down the highway to meet his guests, followed by his groom.

A ride of a couple of miles brought him in sight of the party, and he muttered to himself:

"The old merchant has indeed gotten on his feet again, if he can pay forty thousand for a seaside home for his daughter."

Lulu led the party with a handsome young fellow for an escort, whom Morency knew, and with several others he had a slight acquaintance, and was quickly introduced to those whom he did not know.

Bringing up the rear was the spring-wagon, with a pair of horses and two servants, all together presenting quite an imposing cavalcade.

Dashing rapidly ahead the groom held the massive gate leading into Morency Manor grounds open while the riders passed through, and exclamations of delight came from all as they viewed the grand old mansion, the superb lawn, flower-gardens and the Sound beyond, dotted with many white sails.

In the cove, with flags flying, lay the Ideal at anchor, and from a tower of the mansion floated the Stars and Stripes.

Corks, in all the majesty of a new suit of livery, stood on the piazza, and half-a-dozen farmhands were ready to take the horses.

Mrs. Gretchen and a couple of feminine aides stood in the hall, where Corks also had two assistants, to show the guests their rooms, and traveling-bags were fished out of the wagon and sent to the chambers of the respective visitors.

"This is grand, Lulu, and if you don't stop flirting with the gilded nobodies of society and catch this splendid man and his palatial home, you are a goose," said Mrs. Whitney, a handsome young bride.

After a most delicious lunch, the party adjourned on board the Ideal, and a sail of several hours was had with a spanking breeze.

Then, at six o'clock, dinner was served in the grand dining-hall of the manor, and the guests were forced to admit that Almont Morency knew how to entertain.

Music and dancing followed in the evening, and, after breakfast at eight the next morning, the equestrians departed, perfectly charmed with their visit to Morency, and one and all of them voting Almont Morency a most delightful host and one of the handsomest, best fellows it had ever been their pleasure to meet.

After the departure of his guests, Almont Morency picked up a telegram received for Lulu Vance that morning.

It was as follows:

"Be governed by your own taste and wishes, and purchase any place you like.

"Do not let the price be any object.

"Perhaps Morency would sell his place. My regards to him. FATHER."

"Well, Mr. Vance has indeed a large fortune, as he does not limit his daughter.

"She liked the forty-thousand place, she told me, but thought she would prefer others.

"Then she coolly asked me if I would sell, and what price would tempt me, and just as coolly told me she would take it when I said a hundred thousand dollars.

"I cannot understand this after what I overheard.

"Perhaps, after all, the merchant was deceiving the one he was talking to for some purpose.

"Was I too hasty in what I did?

"Now I must be off, for there is work before me that must be done."

So musing to himself, Almont Morency told Corks and his housekeeper, Mrs. Gretchen, that he was going to be absent for an indefinite time, as he was going to Boston to lay his yacht up for the winter.

An hour after the Ideal stood out of the cove, and two days after when the equestrian party arrived at Sag Harbor to take the steamer to New London, they were surprised to find Almont Morency there, who said:

"I can run you over in my yacht and beat the steamer there with this breeze.

"Send your horses by the boat, and take the Ideal."

All were only too glad to do so, and a pleased smile crossed the face of Almont Morency when Lulu Vance told him she had thus far seen no one on Long Island that suited her, adding:

"Unless it is Morency Manor, and I will give you your price for your lovely home."

"Morency Manor is not for sale at any price, Miss Vance," was the reply.

"Never mind, Lulu," whispered Mrs. Whitney, "it will be yours without purchase some day."

"What do you mean?" asked Lulu Vance in the same low tone.

"Morency loves you, and you will some day be his wife," was the whispered response, and a look of triumph flashed into the eyes of the fair seamer.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CAPTAIN NAMELESS PLAYS TO WIN.

THE very cool manner in which Captain Nameless said that he also meant to fight Dick Reeves, the gambler, was a surprise to all, but to none more so than the man he addressed.

He had shown himself such a superb swordsman, when it was expected Don Alferro would easily kill him, that it was a cause for consternation.

As for the gambler, he knew nothing about a sword, but he had a love for pistol-practice and was known to be always armed when in his salon.

He had been also known to kill several men in a wanton way, and thus far he had escaped justice by some chicanery of law.

For reasons of his own he had been glad to second Alferro in his duel, but had no idea that he would have to take a voyage to do so.

Forced to come where Skipper Dorcas led, he was in no good humor, and the result, with the Cuban lying dead at his feet, had not been calculated to raise his spirits.

Now, when brought face to face with the fact that he was challenged by Captain Nameless, he was naturally startled.

But he had played against too many desperate games in his life to be thrown wholly off his guard, and so he said, in an indifferent way:

"What is your motive for challenging me, my friend?"

"The same for which I fought your Cuban friend."

"You accused him of cheating you."

"Yes; and I so accuse you."

"Why, we never played a game together in our lives," said the gambler, with a mocking laugh.

"We are going to play one now, and a deadly one, too."

"I must know a cause for quarrel."

"Did not Don Alferro lie dead at your feet, you would be quick enough to fight me, for you have the reputation of being a dangerous man."

"Come, tell me why you wish to fight me, and if the reason is a just one, I'll meet you, but with pistols, not blades, for I never handled a sword in my life."

"My reason, Gambler Dick Reeves, is that I am devoted to gambling."

"It is a mania with me, and I have lost and won largely at it in my time, since I was a mere boy; but I have principally lost, for I often play with card-sharps and dishonest men."

"Now I have frequented your gilded hall of fortune for over a year, and when I have won a thousand dollars I have lost five thousand, the result of which is that you are richer by my playing there by as much as a hundred thousand dollars."

"I thought I was being cheated, so watched."

"I noted that you always got me partners, or in your absence, that your dealer did, for private games, the way I prefer playing."

"First it was a French count who was in the city, and he won my money."

"Then an old Southern planter got from me a large sum."

"Next it was a New York merchant, again a naval officer, and then followed a South-American of great wealth."

"A California miner came afterward, and of late I have been playing with your Cuban friend lying dead there."

"I have sharp eyes, Dick Reeves, and I noticed as a peculiarity, that all of your friends appeared to have hands alike."

"For instance, a mole on your hand then, had its match on the hand of the Californian, the South-American and the naval officer."

"Our room where we played was not brilliantly lighted, and yet I could detect a similarity in my Cuban adversary to others I played with."

"The result of this discovery on my part, Dick Reeves, was first to get possession of a pack of your cards, which we had played with."

"I, after some study, detected that they were marked, and once known, the mark was readily detected."

"My next step was to study my adversaries, their size, height, tones of voice and hands, and I became convinced that you, and Don Alferro, in disguise, were in each case my opponents."

"It's a lie! an infamous lie!" cried the gambler, livid with rage.

"It is the truth, for I hired a man in your employ and he got me the proof—don't swear vengeance against him, for he discharged himself the night we left, and is safe."

"Now you know why I accused Don Alferro of cheating, and I have punished him for robbing me."

"Now, here is a statement of my losses in your saloon, and it amounts to over one hundred thousand dollars."

"If you care to give me a check for that sum, the matter ends here, and I pledge myself to take no steps to injure you in the future."

"It would beggar me, for I have no more than that amount."

"Bah! you are a rich man, Dick Reeves, from your stealings."

"Mind you, I deny the charge, but I cannot pay you the money."

"You will not?"

"I cannot; but to compromise, if you will promise not to spread such a rumor against my house to ruin it, I will give you twenty thousand."

"Not a dollar under the sum I have lost, one hundred and five thousand dollars."

"I will not give it to you."

"Then there is but one alternative."

"Name it."

"To fight."

"I am no swordsman, I told you."

"What is the matter with pistols?"

"Nothing, and if you will, I will meet you with pistols," and a gleam of triumph shot into the gambler's eyes, for well he knew his deadly aim, and he mused:

"No man can handle two weapons with the skill that fellow uses a sword."

"I shall kill him."

"It is worth the risk to save my money and the reputation of my place."

"Captain Dorcas, will you now act for Gambler Reeves in this affair? And I will ask our islander friend, Mr. Carr, to serve me," said Captain Nameless.

Then turning to the negro, he continued:

"Did you bring the case of pistols, sir?"

"Yes, boss; here dey is."

And Coal opened a rosewood case, revealing two splendid dueling-pistols.

"You have your choice, Captain Dorcas, for your principal."

The two seconds now conversed together for awhile and decided the arrangements.

The distance was to be ten paces; the gambler's second won the word and Caspar Carr the position.

"All ready, gentlemen," said Skipper Dorcas, briskly.

"One moment, Mr. Reeves," said Captain Nameless.

"Well, sir?"

"If you are killed you can afford to give me back twenty-five per cent. of your stealings from me, so write a check to bearer for twenty-five thousand, and I will give you a paper allowing the same sum to you in case I die."

"This will make the affair more interesting."

"For cool effrontery you excel, I must say."

"As if a duel for life or death could have anything added to make it more interesting," said the gambler.

"Either of us, if we survive, would be most happy to have a snug sum at our command, as well as the pleasure of feeling that we had killed an enemy."

"I will make no such terms, sir."

"Very well, I give you fair warning that, when not cheated, I am a good player, and upon my return I shall go and break your bank."

"If you live!" was the savage response of Dick Reeves, the gambler.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FOR GOLD.

AT the remark of the gambler, significant of death though it was, Captain Nameless merely smiled blandly.

Then the seconds came forward, their weapons in hand, and Dick Reeves, taking his, said:

"I have trusted to you, Skipper Dorcas."

"You have, sir."

"This weapon is a good one and carries a good weight of lead; but I would like to have had a little practice with it first."

"We are here to fight, sir, not practice," sternly said Captain Nameless.

The gambler's face flushed, but he took his stand, while Skipper Dorcas said:

"I am sorry I lost the choice of position, sir, for it places the sun in your eyes; but I won the word."

"It matters not."

"The word, gentlemen, will be:

"Are you ready?"

"Fire! One, two, three!"

"You are to fire between the words one and three."

Both men bowed, and taking his position to one side, Skipper Dorcas stood ready to give the word.

The gambler was calm, a cynical smile upon his lips and a deadly light in his eyes.

He had faced death often before, but not in so deliberate a manner, for his affairs had been encounters over a card table.

Captain Nameless was easy and indifferent, excepting a hateful look in his eyes.

"Are you ready?" came in the commanding voice of Skipper Dorcas.

"Ready!" and the two men spoke together.

"Fire! One—!"

With the word one both weapons flashed.

A red spot was on the forehead of the gambler, just between his eyes, and without a moan he sunk to the earth.

Captain Nameless stepped backward at the report, and both Dorcas and Carr sprang toward him, for the gambler they saw was a dead man.

"It is nothing, for his bullet just cut through my clothing over the heart, and passed in, not drawing blood," he said, aloud, and a tear in his coat showed where the gambler's bullet had struck.

The men stepped to the body of the gambler, while Captain Nameless thrust his hand within his bosom and drew out a flattened piece of lead, which he hastily hid in his pocket, while he muttered:

"My steel shirt served me well."

"The fool should have aimed at my head; but his aim was true, and it was a close call for me."

Then he approached and looked down calmly upon his second victim.

"See what the two men have about them?" he said.

A search was made and the things were handed to him, consisting of some letters, pocket-books, watches and a few other things.

"I will send them to their friends upon my return," he said, and telling Coal to set to work digging the graves, he turned to Caspar Carr and said:

"So you live here all alone upon this island?"

"With my wife only, sir."

"Where do you get your provisions?"

"I have a little sloop, which you doubtless saw, and make a run to Portland every month."

"Ah! but I should think you would find it very lonely here?"

"No, sir, for I have books to read, there is plenty of game and fish and I rather like it."

"And your wife?"

"She does not object to living here."

"Your chief spoke to me of you, and said that you had been unfortunate and remained here until you could get a sum laid by with which to return to civilization."

"You know the chief then, sir?"

"Yes, for I brought a letter from him to Captain Dorcas here."

"Yes, sir, he pays me a liberal salary, and I hope to save enough to leave some day and get a little home in the city."

"I will take a walk about your island, if you do not mind?"

"Oh, no, sir, go where you please," and Caspar Carr turned to aid Coal in the burial, while Captain Nameless walked away.

"That's the coolest fellow I ever saw, Carr," said the skipper, when the mysterious individual was out of sight.

"Who is he?"

"Captain Nameless he calls himself, and, as he says, he brought a letter from the chief."

"He isn't a spy, I hope."

"Oh, no, he came to fight duels, and you see how he fought 'em."

"Yes, he's a dangerous man to face, skipper."

The graves were soon filled in and those ashore assembled upon the shore of the cove, and after awhile Captain Nameless returned and handing a golden souvenir to Caspar Carr went on board the Puzzle, which at once stood out of the harbor and headed southward.

The wind was fresh and favorable, and the Puzzle, crowded with canvas, made a rapid run and dropped anchor in Boston Harbor in good time.

It was night when she arrived, for Skipper Dorcas, for reasons of his own, never sailed from or came into port by daylight.

The skipper was given also, as were the crew, a generous reminder of their late passenger, who went ashore as thoroughly unknown to them as when he arrived.

Two hours after, Skipper Dorcas was boarded by the Unknown Law-Breaker, wearing his impenetrable mask, and after some business transactions between the two, the Puzzle again got up anchor and stood northward to the island retreat.

As the Unknown Chief went ashore, he muttered to himself:

"To-morrow night I shall play to break the bank of the late Mr. Richard Reeves, and then I will have a fund to lay the foundation for the fortune I intend to win."

CHAPTER XL.

SHROUDED IN MYSTERY.

It was the night following the return of the Puzzle from her cruise with the duelists, that a man strolled into a large and handsome saloon situated on one of the obscure streets of Boston.

It was the gambling hell of Richard Reeves.

There were more fashionable gambling halls in the city, frequented only by the young aristocrats; but Dick Reeves's saloon did more business than all.

It was gorgeously fitted up, had a number of private card-rooms, and a supper was served each night that was most tempting, while wines and liquors were on hand *ad libitum*.

The class of customers that frequented Reeves's saloon were from a bank president down to a bootblack, and rumor had it that he was immensely wealthy.

There was no limit to his game, and from Fortune's wheel at ten cents a chance on the turn, to twenty-five thousand dollars on the turn of a card, large sums had been won and lost there.

The absence of the gambler had not caused his employees any uneasiness.

He had said that he was going upon a cruise for a day or two, and his dealer had the keys to the safe.

The stranger who now entered had the dark face of a Mexican, though he was rather large for one of that race.

He wore a cloak, a sombrero, and his hair was curling and fell upon his shoulders, while he wore a ferocious black mustache.

Diamonds sparkled in his shirt-front and upon his fingers, and he appeared to be a man who regarded money lightly.

He spoke with a decided foreign accent, and told the dealer he wished to play heavily.

He was soon engaged in a game, and his large bets drove others out of the game, until he alone faced the dealer.

From the very first he seemed to be a favorite with fortune, for he won.

The dealer stood it unmoved for a while, but at last paled slightly as the stranger continued to draw large sums toward him.

Many crowded around to look on, and yet the stranger appeared wholly unconcerned.

When occasionally he lost it made no more impression upon his dark face than when he won.

At last the dealer said:

"Don't you think you have played enough for to-night?"

"Ah! is the sefior afraid to risk as a bank what one individual chances?"

"I am not afraid; but you have won twenty-five thousand, sir, and the proprietor is absent, so I care not to take the responsibility of risking more."

"Make it another game for five thousand, and win or lose, I quit."

Thus bantered, the dealer said:

"Agreed."

The game was won by the stranger, and pocketing his winnings he bowed to the dealer, walked to the supper-table and ate a hearty supper, after which he left the rooms.

He had hardly reached the pavement when there came a sharp report of a pistol.

Rushing down to the street they found a man lying on the pavement dying.

"I tried to rob him and he shot me."

It was all he could say before he died, but it showed that the stranger was able to play as good a game of life and death as at cards.

After leaving the gambling-saloon the stranger wended his way to the house which the reader has seen the Unknown Law-Breaker enter.

Half an hour after there came out of the door no less a personage than Captain Nameless, and he walked rapidly down to the harbor.

There he called to a sleepy boatman who rowed him out to a vessel at anchor.

The boat put back with the boatman only, sail was spread upon the vessel, and the craft stood out to sea.

The vessel was not the Puzzle.

The next day the morning papers contained the following startling intelligence:

"A GAME OF LIFE AND DEATH!"

A DUEL TO THE BITTER END.

RICHARD REEVES KILLED!

AN UNKNOWN DUELIST!

"We have received the following letter which explains itself:

"Editor Boston ————:

"A few nights ago I entered a famous gambling-hell of your city to play a game of cards.

"The proprietor, Mr. Richard Reeves, introduced to me a Cuban of the name of Don Alferro, once a famous swordsman.

"I lost thousands, discovered that I had been cheated and made the accusation.

"I was challenged to fight or apologize, so chose the former.

"We went to a secluded island, and Don Alferro fell by my sword.

"Enraged at finding Gambler Reeves an ally to cheat me, I challenged him, and we fought with pistols at ten paces.

"I shot him through the brain, and his bullet hit me over the heart and glanced off, but the wound was nothing.

"The two men were buried where they fell, and I send you the money, papers and jewelry they had about them.

"There were three witnesses to the duels besides the participants.

"Kindly give the things herewith sent to those who have the right to claim them, and oblige

"Yours,

"UNKNOWN."

"Upon the reception of this startling letter last night, a reporter went at once to the gambling hall of Richard Reeves to investigate.

"He found the games in full blast, though it was after midnight.

"He asked for Mr. Reeves, but was told that he had gone away for a few days, but had overstayed his time.

"Then he asked for Don Alferro.

"He had accompanied Mr. Reeves.

"Where had they gone? No one knew, other than that they had spoken of taking a short cruise.

"Had any strangers been playing in the hall of late?

"Strangers often did so, but a Mexican, as he was supposed to be, had played there that night, and won to the tune of thirty thousand dollars.

"Who was he?"

"No one knew.

"Where had he gone? Out of the hall, and had killed a well-known desperate character at the door, as he stepped out, the dying man confessing that he had tried to rob the stranger.

"Had any one any idea of why Mr. Reeves had gone away?"

"No one knew.

"Did any one else go with him besides Don Alferro?"

"No one could tell.

"Was Mr. Reeves a married man?"

"Yes, his wife lived out in the country.

"Then the reporter made known the contents of the letter mysteriously sent to the editor of this paper, and there was at once consternation in the hall, which was at once closed by the dealer, who

departed for the gambler's home to break the news to his wife.

"We hope to give the reader a full account of this very remarkable and mysterious affair to-morrow, and discover just who this deadly duelist is, who gives his own account of the affair, when we shrewdly suspect that there was foul play somewhere, for Richard Reeves was known to be a dead-shot, while Don Alferro had never met his equal with the sword."

So ended the newspaper article, and the next day the following was published:

"Detectives and reporters are wholly at a loss to solve the Reeves-Alferro mystery.

"Not the slightest clew to 'Unknown' can be found, and so the matter rests.

"The gambling-hell has been closed, and the widow of the dead gambler says that it shall never be opened again, and for this blessing let us give thanks.

"It is supposed that the Mexican who won so largely might have been the unknown duelist.

"If more is discovered of this strange affair, we will give our readers full particulars."

But no other discovery was made, and the fate of the gambler and the Don remained clouded in mystery.

CHAPTER XLI.

A TRAITOR AND A TRAITRESS.

THE detective chief is again in his office, and he and Lieutenant Lomax have been conversing in an earnest tone together.

At last the chief says:

"You have every report in, Lomax?"

"All, sir, from the date the people were put to work."

"The report of the spies as well?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let us have the result now."

"I fear it is not equal to your hopes, sir, for the money you expend."

"Rome was not built in a day, good Lomax."

"Now let us first take up the reports of the movements of Almont Morency."

Taking up a paper Lomax read aloud:

"Mr. Almont Morency passes his time between his home, his yacht and New York City.

"He cruises eastward as far as Boston at times, comes to New York, has dropped anchor for days off a handsome villa on the Hudson River—"

"Whose is the home?"

"It belongs to a lady, unmarried, whose name is Vivian."

"Ah! and he anchors off her home for days?"

"Yes, sir," and then Lomax continues reading:

"He visits often, almost daily, the home of the rich merchant, Harvey Vance."

"He has a daughter?"

"Yes, sir, a most beautiful girl and one who will be very rich, if her father does not go under, as there is a rumor that he will."

"He goes to two clubs, but spends little time there, and he has lately entertained at his home an equestrian party, Miss Vance being one of the number."

"After his guests' departure, Mr. Morency sailed in his yacht to the eastward, and he took the same party across the Sound from Sag Harbor to New London, after which he went on to the eastward to lay his yacht up for the winter."

"And did a man go to Boston to note his arrival there, and what he did?"

"No, sir."

"Send one at once; yes, two of them."

A bell was touched twice and two men entered, and they were at once dispatched to Boston to still dog the steps of Almont Morency from some strange reason of the man who was the chief of the Secret Service League.

"Now to Mrs. Balfour?"

"She was found to be as true as steel, sir."

"I am glad of it."

"And the others?"

"There is one exception, chief."

"Name him."

"Wallace Reed."

"Ah! I would not have suspected him."

"It is the one we least expect who goes wrong often, chief."

"True; but call the people together and let me know what the charges are against Reed?"

"That he has been seen, sir, going regularly to the City Detective Agency, sir, and when spotted it was found that he was promising the chief valuable information at a future day, but so far had made no report."

"I got this, sir, from a man I have under pay in the agency's office."

"Very good; now bring the people together."

In an hour's time all were assembled, and as they entered the door, on their arrival, each had been supplied with a mask, for the chief did not care to have his people known to each other any more than was necessary.

They were over a score in number, and five of them were females.

When they had taken seats in a row around the room the chief said:

"I have to thank you for having done your best under existing circumstances, and that more has not been done do not fear that I am angry."

"I am one to bide my time, and in the end success will come to me through the good work you do."

"To-morrow Mr. Lomax will have orders for all of you for other work."

"But now I wish to tell you that I have found one who was false to his trust."

"Wallace Reed step forth."

All had looked about at the charge, and one man started visibly when the name was called.

"Step forth, Wallace Reed!"

The one addressed did not move.

"Unmask him, Lomax."

The order was obeyed, and a white, scared face was revealed.

"Report, sir, what you have done that was disloyal to your chief."

"Nothing," was the sullen reply.

"You are a liar, then, as well as a traitor, are you?"

The man was silent, but his lips quivered.

"I will tell you, sir, that you went to a detective agency in this city, told him that you belonged to a League of Secret Service men, gotten up for some purpose you yet could not understand, but when you could do so you would bring him all the particulars, and it would be well worth his while to pledge you an officer's rank in his agency and give you a certain sum in money."

"Fortunately, the duties you had to do were not such that you could give him a full clew, but such as you knew you gave him, excepting where we were located, for if he had had that secret then he could have acted without your aid."

"Do I not speak the truth?"

"Yes."

"And your motive?"

"I knew that your League was not a legal one, and supposed, from what I could find out, that it was to ascertain the wealth of certain families, and in the end blackmail certain people."

"Therefore I acted in the interest of law."

"Well, sir, I shall now act in the interest of justice."

"Iron that man, Lomax, and lead him away and obey the orders I gave you."

"Are you going to kill me?" cried the man, in dire alarm.

"I am going to punish a traitor, sir."

"Lead him away!"

He would have resisted, but Lomax touched a bell and two black-robed forms entered, their faces and heads wholly concealed, and in their hands they carried irons.

Instantly the traitor was seized and ironed, hands and feet.

Then he was led away in silence.

But where, or to meet what fate, those who remained knew not.

"My friends, treachery is a crime that no punishment can be too severe for."

"Let that man's fate be a warning to you not to break the solemn oaths you made when you became members of this Secret League."

"You draw good pay, you are not asked to break the law, except in extreme cases, you voluntarily took your oath of fellowship, for had you not so wished to do, you could have gone your way when selected as a member by Lomax."

"What my motive is, is my own affair, and I will tolerate no interference with my actions and orders."

"In good time I hope for good results, and then, far better off financially for the services you have rendered, you can go your way."

"But until then be true, and know you, who may entertain treachery, that, as I found out that Wallace Reed was a traitor, so will an eye be upon you."

"You can go."

Two by two, and one at a time, they filed slowly out of the room, leaving by the door on the street opposite from where the rooms of the chief were.

As they passed the doorkeeper they gave up their masks, and he allowed only one or two to leave at a time, so as to attract no attention.

Upon the door without was a sign which read:

PROFESSOR VON CRABBE'S

ART ROOM.

But there was one of the masked forms that had not departed with the others.

That one was a woman, and when Lomax, who stood at the door, motioned to her to leave, she said, in a low tone:

"I would speak with the chief."

"Well?" and the chief turned toward her.

"May I speak to you alone, sir?"

"Yes. Lomax, leave the room please."

The lieutenant departed, and the woman approached the chief.

"Have you a report to make?" he asked.

"I have a confession to make, sir," was the low reply.

"A confession?"

"Yes, I too have been treacherous."

"Ha! and a woman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who are you?"

She slowly removed her mask, and the words broke from the lips of the chief in utter amazement:

"Eleanor Balfour a traitress?"

CHAPTER XLII.

THE TRAITRESS.

WHEN the chief gazed upon the beautiful girl before him, who had declared herself a traitress, there was a look of pain commingled with alarm on his face.

He seemed to be hurt, rather than angry, and after a moment said:

"Tell me of your treachery, that I may know if it is beyond reparation."

"I have done no act to compromise you, or the Secret League, sir, for I have made no confessions to any one."

"In what, then, has been your treachery?"

"You have been kind to me, chief, and engaged the services of my mother and myself at handsome salaries."

"In return I have tried to serve you, and my mother has done no act to condemn."

"Only yourself?"

"Yes."

"And your act?"

"You remember that my mother and I were sent upon a special service?"

"To Morency Manor?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Your allusion to-day to the oath of fidelity we had taken opened my eyes to the fact that I had committed a sin, and, though with the punishment of Wallace Reed before my eyes, I determined to confess to you my sin."

"I am listening."

"We secured, as you know, the tin box, containing certain papers which you wished, and took them from the safe in the library of Morency Manor."

"I recall all that."

"When we purposely broke down near the Morency gate, I saw, in the gentleman who came back with our coachman and offered the hospitality of his home, one whom I had met before."

"Almont Morency?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"Though I recognized him at a glance, I did not let my mother know it, for I had a reason in not doing so."

"And your reason?"

"Will soon be made known to you."

"I felt grieved that we had come to do an act against Mr. Morency, but would do nothing to prevent my mother from doing her duty."

"You knew where you were going before you left?"

"But I did not know that Mr. Morency was the man I recognized him as being."

"Seeing him at his home, I felt that he was not one to do a wrong; but that was for you to decide as to why you wished those papers."

"I therefore held my own secret, my mother got the box and brought it to New York."

"She had done her work well, and so, to save Mr. Morency, I led her to believe that the house was entered by a burglar and the box stolen."

"And this was not the case?"

"It was not, sir."

"Then you took the box?"

"I did, sir."

"And have it?"

"No, chief."

"Where is it?"

"Mr. Morency has it."

"Ah! you returned it to him?"

"I did, sir."

"When?"

"When I was supposed to have gone to visit an old schoolmate, I disguised myself as a boy and went to Morency Manor, returning the box to its owner."

"And he took it, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"He considered it most valuable, doubtless, and there was a sneer in the voice of the chief."

"So much so, sir, that he told me he would give twenty thousand dollars for it."

"It is worth more than that to him."

"He certainly was glad to get it."

"And you did this because he was an old friend?"

"He was not an old friend, sir, for he did not even know me."

"Indeed; but how did you tell him you got possession of the box?"

"I told him that my mother had taken it, having been paid to do so by some one."

"Did you tell him who it was who paid her to get that box?"

"I did not, sir."

"Had you known would you have told?"

"By no means, sir, for my debt was paid to Mr. Morency in returning him the box."

"And getting the reward?"

"Chief, that is unkind, for not a dollar would I touch of Almont Morency's money."

"Ah, indeed?"

"I would not allow him to even pay my expenses, incurred in returning him the box."

"Your motive, please?"

"I recognized in Mr. Morency one who had saved my life."

"And yet he did not know you?"

"No, sir."

"Strange."

"It is not strange, sir, for it was when I was at boarding-school."

"The academy caught on fire the very night after the closing of the school."

"Fortunately most of the girls had gone home, but there were still half a hundred souls in the building."

"It was a fearful night, the wind blowing a gale and the rain descending in torrents."

"A horseman, riding along the country road saw the flames breaking out, and wheeling into the grounds dashed up the long avenue crying, 'Fire! fire!' at the top of his voice."

"He awoke some by his cries, but dashing into the house he began the good work of life-saving."

"He risked his own life time and again, and came into my room and rescued me from death, for I was still asleep and yet half-stifled with the smoke."

"Many others he saved, and then, with blistered hands and face, he modestly slipped away in the midst of the excitement and disappeared."

"No one knew who he was, or whither he had gone."

"The next day when we took the train at the nearest town to the academy, we tried hard to find out who he was."

"But we failed, for even the doctor whom he called in at the hotel to dress his burns did not know, and we could find no clew."

"Imagine then, chief, my surprise and sorrow in finding in the man whose home we went to rob of valuable papers, the one who had saved my life, and who had nobly risked his own to do so."

"With gratitude in my heart, I determined to return these papers to him, and thus was I treacherous to you, and I stand ready to accept my punishment."

The chief had been deeply moved by the strange story of the lovely girl.

He had gazed at her with a look that seemed to read her soul.

Then he said in a low, kind voice:

"You are a noble girl, and I shall pardon you for what you have done, for your heart was the dictator."

"Speak to no one upon what has passed, not even your mother."

"I deeply deplore the loss of those papers, but you are forgiven and I am your friend."

"You can go."

CHAPTER XLIII.

TRACKED.

THE craft that left some time after the Puzzle's departure held on her way to the northward, and it will be remembered that she carried on board none other than the Unknown Law-Breaker, who had figured as Captain Nameless in the duels on the island rendezvous, and also as the Mexican who had so cleverly won thirty thousand dollars from the dealer of the dead gambler's bank.

Wholly unknown to his own people as the chief himself, he had had an opportunity of investigating affairs as they were.

He seemed well pleased with Skipper Dorcas, and had decided in his own mind that he could wholly trust him.

But he was not pleased with Caspar Carr.

Some discoveries which he had made caused him to have suspicion that the islander was not playing a square game, so to speak.

This it was that had caused him to make his run up the coast in a craft other than the Puzzle.

The Puzzle had gone on another cruise to the island, to bring back a cargo of booty.

But the vessel following far in her wake did not go to the island.

Instead she ran into the harbor of Portland and there dropped anchor, and it looked as though she had come to stay some little time, for the Unknown Law-Breaker went on shore to remain, taking certain baggage with him.

He got a pleasant room in a house overlooking the harbor and its approach, and he had a habit of sitting each day in the window, gazing out upon the marine picture, or walking upon the promenade that commanded an excellent view far and near.

He seemed to be watching for a coming vessel, and he appeared to be very patient about it too.

One afternoon as he reached the promenade and took a seat upon a favorite bench, he raised his glass to his eyes, for he always carried it, and swept the waters with his vision.

As he did so, a small craft sailed into view from behind a distant island.

"Ah!"

It was all the Unknown uttered, but his glass was leveled straight upon the craft.

It was a little sloop, under every sail, and heading for the harbor.

She could scarcely be over fifteen tons burden, and the glass revealed that there were two persons on board.

"A man and a woman I see."

"It is my craft."

So saying, he returned rapidly to his room, and soon after appeared in the garb of a sailor, and it would have taken a keen eye to detect in

the one who had entered the house, the same one who came out of it.

Going down to the wharves, he sauntered about in a free-and-easy manner until he saw the craft he had sighted drop anchor.

It was sunset, and waiting for awhile he beheld a boat put off from the craft, and about dark a man landed.

Making his boat fast, he walked slowly up into the town, and the man who watched him dogged his steps.

After going a few steps, the man turned into a shop which seemed to be a receptacle for goods intended for a curiosity shop.

There was hardly anything one wanted that could not be found in that shopkeeper's collection.

Having seen where his game went, the Unknown returned to the wharf and concealed himself there.

He waited with the utmost patience for one hour, and then a boat passed him from a wharf above.

It contained two men and seemed to be well loaded.

It went straight out to the little craft, and was there for a considerable while.

Then it returned inshore and right where he was.

But he drew back in the shadow of some lumber and remained hidden.

Just then a wagon drove down on the wharf, and the men in the boat sprung out on the pier.

There was one man in the wagon, which was a covered vehicle, and the three set to work, rapidly transferring what was in the boat to the vehicle.

This was soon done, farewells were said, the wagon drove off with two men, and the third got into his boat and pulled back to the little vessel.

Quickly the watcher followed the wagon.

It stopped at the very place he had seen the man from the sloop enter, and the goods were soon taken into the shop.

Then the watcher walked rapidly toward the promenade that overlooked Casco Bay and the harbor.

He swept the waters with his glass and saw the little sloop standing out of the harbor.

"It is as I expected," he muttered, and he returned to his room.

Several days after the keeper of the shop referred to received a visitor.

It was the Unknown in his sailor suit.

"Your name is Pierce?" he said to a keen-eyed man who met him.

"Yes, mate, what will you have?"

"I wish to see you in private."

"Ah!" and the shopkeeper looked suspicious.

"I come from Caspar Carr."

"Ah, yes; come into my office."

He led the way into a private room, and the Unknown said:

"Since Caspar sailed from here last Monday night, he has decided to invest his money in certain speculations, and wishes to draw what you have in hand."

"Your name, mate?"

"Carson."

"You represent Carr, you say?"

"Yes."

"Have you no letter?"

"Why, yes, I forgot to give it to you."

"We passed each other Tuesday, and he signalled me to board him and gave me this."

He handed over a slip of paper on which was written in pencil:

"The bearer, Ben Carson, is my friend and ally. Do as he says, and I'll explain next voyage."
"CASPAR CARR."

"This is all right, I guess."

"I always wants documents for what I do."

"What's your business, mate?"

"Smuggling."

"Oho! well, I guess its good pay; but just what does Carr want?"

"He has delivered to you cargoes on the following dates, or thereabouts, and you have paid him—" and the Unknown glanced over the paper in his hand, as though trying to decipher some words.

"I've paid him next to nothing, so he don't wish to draw all in my hands?"

"Yes, and is sorry it is not more, for the scheme he has on hand."

"What is it?"

"He said he'd tell me on my return."

"Where do you meet him?"

"At his island."

"Well, I can't give it to you to-night, for I haven't ten thousand in my safe; but I'll get it after the bank opens to-morrow."

"That will do, for I don't go back until to-morrow evening."

"And you have no idea what he is going to do with the money?"

"Yes, I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"I think he wants to buy a yacht and make a smuggler of her."

"He'd better stick to his own safe work."

"It does not pay enough to suit him."

"Well, come to-morrow, Mate Carson, and I'll see you."

The Unknown did call on the morrow, and his clever ruse got out of the hands of the receiver and seller of stolen goods, all the capital which Caspar Carr had laid by for himself and wife to enjoy at a future day.

Soon after getting the money the Unknown sailed out of the harbor and his destination was the port of Boston.

CHAPTER XLIV. STILL IN THE DARK.

"WELL, Mr. Bergheim, how went the goods this time?"

The speaker was the Unknown Law-Breaker, and, masked as on his former visits, he was again in the room of the pretended Jew, Carl Bergheim.

"Business is dull, capt'ins."

"It always is when you have to pay me, but brisk enough when you wish to sell."

"I gets small prices."

"You get large prices, you mean, and give me small ones; but the last cargo was a good one, so I will want ten thousand dollars for it."

"Not so much."

"Every dollar of it, man."

"You was so grasping, capt'ins."

The Masked Unknown laughed.

Then he said:

"I may not be able to get you more than another cargo before the severe winter sets in, and I need all I can get for one."

"To gamble away?"

"That is none of your business, sir."

"That was so; but I lost my fortunes mineself by gamblings, and I want to warn you, for if I was not play I now be a happy mans, and marry the lady I loves long ago."

"But one mans won all my moneys, and I was in despair and nearly take my life."

"But one man save me from kill myself."

"How?"

"I was going to drown myself, and hear cry for help! help!"

"I run me there and find bad mens beating old mans and rob him."

"I vas kill one and scare the other off, and the one I save catch me by the arm and run."

"He never stop until he get me here, and he tell me he was old Jew, have no family and me like his son."

"It was not a square business that he do; but I was a beggar, hopeless, too, so I stayed with him, and when he die, nearly two year ago, he leave me his property, and I keep up the business, don't you see?"

"A very romantic story, Bergheim, and you keep up the business well for yourself," said the Unknown.

"Maybe I make enough some time to marry the ladys I love and be good, honest man."

"Maybe you will, but I doubt it."

"Now let me have the money, and should I not come next time, the skipper of my vessel will, and you can pay him as you would me for all he brings you."

"He can be trusted, capt'ins?"

"His neck is in the noose with yours and mine, Bergheim."

"Yes, but you was unknown, capt'ins."

"And I shall remain so."

"Come give me the money."

"It was too much."

"Give it to me, I say!"

Carl Bergheim obeyed, and as he arose to go, the Unknown said:

"Bergheim, twice you have put men on my track when I have left here."

"If it occurs again, I shall simply inform the police in regard to you, and if you can draw me into the whirlpool with you, you are welcome to do so."

"Now if you have another plot laid for me, I warn you to call off your dogs."

The Jew started, and the start showed a guilty conscience.

"One moment, capt'ins," he said, as he arose.

"Where are you going?"

"To call off my dogs, as you was say."

"Then you own up?"

"I was wish to know who you was."

"Why?"

"For self-protection."

"Well, you are foiled."

The man made no reply, and the Unknown continued:

"Then you have men on the watch for me to-night?"

"I confess it."

"How many?"

"Four."

"Where are they?"

"Without in the streets, capt'ins."

"Send for them to come here, put them in that room, and I will remain behind that curtain as they pass through."

"You are to remain seated where you are, and if you do more than order them into that room, I will kill you."

"If they follow me after I leave, I'll report you to the police."

"I am in earnest, Carl Bergheim."

The Jew was evidently alarmed, for he rung the bell for his clerk, sent him to call the four men on watch for the departure of the Un-

known, and the latter stepped behind a heavy portiere, and stood pistol in hand.

"Go into that room until I send for you," the Jew said to the four men as they appeared, and they obeyed in silence, while the keen eyes of the Unknown peering through a cut he had made in the curtain glanced into the face of each one with a look that told he would know them should he meet them again.

When the last man had disappeared, the Unknown said:

"The man who will represent me, Bergheim, bears the name of Dorcas, and will bear a letter from me."

"The night?"

The Jew made no reply, and the Law-Breaker passed out into the street.

But he was still cautious, for he called and rode in several hacks before he went to his quarters.

After a stay there of an hour he went down to the harbor and was soon on board the Puzzle.

"Dorcas, come into the cabin with me."

"Yes, chief."

"Dorcas, I deem you an honest man, and I wish you to represent me."

"Yes, chief."

"I intend to turn over the vessel to you, and here is a letter to Carl Bergheim, a Jew, and his address is here."

"He is the one who sells my booty, and he will sell what you bring in in the future."

"You will get your money from him, and all profits, over expenses and your own needs, put in the bank in your name."

"Should I not return within the year, all is yours."

"At the island I find that Caspar Carr is a thief."

"Ah!"

"Yes, the skipper of the Advance and he are in league, and Carr, as soon as you leave the island, puts his booty gotten from Fogg, of the Advance, on board his sloop, and runs it to Portland and sells it."

"Tell Carr from me that I watched him, saw him deliver his cargo, then went to his man and drew all his money, telling him that he had sent me."

"Chief, you are a wonder to me," said Dorcas, with admiration.

"And to others, so you had best not let any one know that I am not at the helm, as before."

"I will not, sir."

"Now what do you know about Carr?"

"Well, sir, all I know is that he ran off with his wife, who is a rich man's daughter, and he was trying to make money so as to return and show the old man he was not the beggar he thought him."

"Well, pay him his salary as before, but watch him, for he shall not get rich by stealing from me."

"Now, Dorcas, good-by, and remember, if aught should happen that you should not see me again, the Puzzle and the Law-Breaking business I turn over to you."

"If I return, of course I am once more chief."

With this the Unknown left the Puzzle, and Skipper Dorcas stood gazing after the retreating boat, almost dazed by his good luck, while there fell slowly from his lips the words:

"And after all he still remains utterly unknown to me."

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SECRET SERVICE CHIEF'S RESOLVE.

"CHIEF, I have news for you."

The speaker was Lomax, the Lieutenant of the Secret Service League, and he entered the rooms of his captain one morning early in the month of December.

"Well, Lomax, out with it," said the chief, who saw by the face of his officer that he had something of importance to communicate.

"The game has left the city."

"Morency?"

"Yes, sir."

"Gone home?"

"No indeed, he has left the country."

"Ah!"

"It is true, chief."

"When?"

"He sailed two days ago."

"For Europe?"

"No, sir, for Rio Janeiro."

"In Heaven's name why has he gone there?"

"I do not know why, sir, but he has gone."

"You are sure of this?"

"Perfectly, for see here."

As Lomax spoke he unfolded a copy of the *Herald* and read aloud:

"Among the passengers on the steamer sailing yesterday for Rio Janeiro was Mr. Ahmont Morency, one of the richest young men in the metropolis."

"Mr. Morency goes on this Southern cruise to escape the rigid Northern winter, and we will hope for his return much improved in health."

"I did not know he was ill."

"Nor I, chief."

"Is not this a blind?"

"Why should it be, sir, for he cannot know that we are shadowing him."

"Did you get any further proof?"

"Yes, sir, I asked at the shipping office who got the ticket, and the description suited Morency."

"Then I went to the hotel where he stops, and the clerk told me that he had taken the steamer for South America."

"I also saw the driver who took him down to the steamer."

"Then it must be true; but did he go alone?"

"Yes, sir, though there is a little mystery about it also."

"What is that?"

"The lady to whom he has been so attentive is also gone."

"Miss Vance?"

"No, sir, the lady on the Hudson."

"Miss Vivian?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where has she gone?"

"To Europe."

"Not to South America?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Perfectly, sir, for I saw one who knows her well, and he met her on the steamer and she was on it when he came off."

"She told him she was going to Europe for an indefinite time, and her beautiful home is offered for sale."

"Can this be possible?"

"It is, sir."

"And Miss Vance?"

"Still at home."

"It does seem strange, Lomax, that Morency should leave for South America about the time that Miss Vivian should sail for Europe, and more that she has offered her place for sale."

"I don't understand it exactly, chief."

"Nor I, and I must think it all over."

"I was sure that he intended to marry one of those young ladies, either Miss Vance or Miss Vivian, from his devoted attention to both of them, and I only wished to be sure which one before I acted in the matter."

"But how long will he be gone, I wonder?"

"I could find out, sir, by sending a man to his home."

"Do so and see if that is also offered for sale."

"See if the servants have been discharged, or if they are kept to await his return."

"It may be that he has just gone for the voyage?"

"Perhaps so, chief; but I will dispatch a man at once who will find out all you would know."

A detective was at once sent out to the Morency Manor, and the next day he returned and made his report.

The old servants had not been discharged, only a few extra hands, and the house was simply closed temporarily, for Corks reported that his master would not be very long away.

"Well, we can rest on our oars as regards Morency for the present; but there is other work to be done, Lomax."

"Plenty of it, chief," was the reply.

"It would now be a good idea to get that tin box."

"The very thing, sir, if he has not destroyed it."

"He will hardly do so, after keeping it this long."

"He will surely not still keep it in the library."

"No, but in the new wall-safe which he told Mrs. Balfour he had made in his bedroom."

"Who can I send, sir?"

"I hardly know," said the chief, in thoughtful mood.

"Shall I go?"

"You do not know the house?"

"No, sir, but I might learn about it."

"No, Lomax, I will go myself."

"You, chief?"

"Yes, why not?"

"But there may be risks which you should not meet."

"I will go, Lomax, and will arrange to start next week."

"I may be gone some days, so do not be anxious, and I shall bring back the box if it is in that house."

"I sincerely hope so, sir."

"And I wish you to put a good man to shadow the Vance home."

"The young lady, sir, or the old man?"

"Both, and the house as well, for if this is a trick of Morency's, to pretend to have left the country, the place to find him will be about the Vance home."

"That is so, chief, and I'll put a good man on the work, or a woman if you think best."

"How would Miss Eleanor Balfour do?"

"She would not do, Lomax," was the dry response of the Secret Service chief.

"I will have Gordon go then, sir."

"The very man," responded the chief, and the lieutenant departed to find the man, while his captain remained in his room lost in deep meditation.

His face became clouded, now that he was alone, and a look of pain crossed his features several times; but the pain came from the heart and brain, not from physical suffering.

At last he muttered to himself:

"And he has gone?"

"Can it be possible that after all he has escaped me?"

"Can it be that he has gone with that lovely being, Celeste Vivian?"

"My God! what if he has done so?"

"I fear I have not been watchful enough."

"But now it remains for me to get that box of papers, for if he has kept them thus long, he will not destroy them now."

"Yes, I will go to Morency Manor, and if I cannot secure them in one way, I can in another."

"But I will only try that way as a last resort."

A few days after the Secret Service chief left for Morency Manor.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TAPS, THE VALET.

THE strange marriage of Lulu Vance to old Daniel Dawson remained, as that very scheming and remarkable young lady intended that it should.

Daniel Dawson was an odd character, and of his antecedents almost nothing was known.

As he was very rich little was asked regarding him.

He had come to New York from somewhere in the West with a fortune, and he had made his influence felt in financial circles.

He had an elegant home, stately servants, and lived in luxury.

His investments were sure and paying.

What he was really worth no one knew for certain, but it was estimated everywhere from two millions to ten.

And yet his health was wretched.

He could not sleep at night, was subject to nightmares, and kept a servant constantly in his room when he did sleep, to awaken him at the first moment of a dream of terror.

He said that it was from indigestion; but a few thought that his past life had something to do with it.

He had a confidential servant, one who had come to New York with him, and yet the curious could find out nothing from this man, who never spoke unless spoken to.

He seemed like a man patiently biding his time, waiting for some event to happen.

The other servants in the house were afraid of Taps, for such was his name, and his word was law with them.

Taps also acted as private secretary to his master.

Such was the man whom Lulu Vance had bound herself to.

After his secret marriage to her, old Dawson, for he was past three-score, was a daily visitor to the Vance home, and he dined there frequently.

He had the vanity to believe that Lulu loved him, and that it was a mere woman's romantic whim that had caused her to urge him into a secret marriage with her.

So he felt flattered thereby.

What her motive was the reader can guess.

She wished to save her father from ruin, she was anxious to have all the spending money she desired, to receive handsome presents, and to cause Almont Morency to believe she was yet the heiress to millions.

She knew that he had overheard her father's conversation with Daniel Dawson, in which he expected to save himself from ruin by marrying her to him, Morency.

She felt that he had heard but little, and did not doubt but that this plan to ensnare him had driven him off.

If she could save her father from failure, if she could cause him to appear more than ever successful in financial matters, she did not doubt but that Almont Morency would feel that he either had misunderstood the conversation, or that her father was playing a part for some purpose to deceive old Dawson.

She had cleverly played her cards, and thus far held trumps in her little hands.

Her equestrian party was all to see Morency Manor, to convince Almont Morency that her father had money for her to squander.

But, most of all, Lulu Vance had banked, in her secret marriage, upon the fact that Daniel Dawson would die before the year was ended when he could claim her as his wife.

But instead of dying, the old man appeared to gain strength.

This was contrary to the wishes of the young bride, and was a cause of worry to her.

Mr. Dawson was most generous to her indeed, for he gave her a new turnout with thoroughbred horses, a Kentucky saddle horse, diamonds galore, and each Sunday placed in her little desk a purse of gold for pin-money.

But this was all very well while she did not have to acknowledge him as her husband.

Her aim was to win Almont Morency, whom she really loved with all the intensity of her passionate nature.

Did he know of her marriage she felt that it would all end with her.

She dreaded Celeste Vivian as a rival, and would not let her win if she could prevent it, by fair means if possible, by foul if it must be.

One day Lulu received a note.

It was well written, and read:

"It is most urgent that Mrs. Daniel Dawson—née Lulu Vance—should grant me an interview."

"If she will ride in the Park this afternoon on horseback, I will join her in the Equestrian Ride a few squares from the entrance."

"I will approach her as though a gentleman friend, ask to join her, and she can dismiss her groom."

"I will be there at three, and it will be wise for Miss Vance to grant my request to meet me."

"With respect, HUGH TAPLEY."

Lulu read this letter over and over again.

There was one thing that startled her; it addressed her as Mrs. Dawson, showing that the writer knew of her marriage.

She dared not disregard it, and so she decided to go.

Certainly in the Park no harm could come to her.

So at three o'clock she entered the Riders' Avenue with her groom, Spurs, riding the regulation distance behind her.

Toward her came a horseman, well-mounted, well-dressed and riding well.

He raised his hat and bowed gracefully as he approached, and wheeling alongside of her said, in a voice that the groom might hear:

"A delightful morning for a ride, Miss Vance."

"May I have the honor of joining you?"

Lulu bowed, and, turning to the groom, called out:

"Spurs, you can return home."

The groom promptly obeyed, and then Lulu glanced at her companion.

He looked the gentleman, and had a strong, but not handsome face.

Somewhere she had met him before, but just where she could not recall.

"We have met before, Mr. Tapley, for so you signed yourself?"

"We have, Miss Vance, often."

"Often?"

"Yes."

"But where? for I cannot recall, though your face is most familiar."

"I am known to you as Taps, Miss Vance."

"Taps! Mr. Dawson's valet?"

"Yes, Miss Vance."

"This is unpardonable, sir, and—"

"Curb your anger, Miss Vance, for I wish to serve you as well as myself."

"I was born a gentleman, though I hold the position of general utility man to Mr. Dawson."

"And your motive for this interview?"

"To benefit you as well as myself, for I know of your marriage."

"Did Mr. Dawson tell you?"

"He keeps nothing from me."

"He has said that you were his confidential servant."

"I am more; but I will not quarrel with the name of servant, Miss Vance."

"Well, sir, let me know your motive for this interview?"

"You married Mr. Dawson to save your father from financial wreck, and hoping that your husband would die before the year ended."

"Instead he is getting much better, and will claim you the very day the year expires."

"Now you do not wish this, I know, and so I have come to make terms with you."

"What terms?"

"When Mr. Dawson dies I am to have, left me in his will, one hundred thousand dollars."

"You?"

"Yes, Miss Vance, and that is little enough, for he is worth millions, as I know, and no man knows better just what fortune he possesses."

"If you will make that fortune to me two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, I will see that you get his millions," and Hugh Tapley looked serenely into the astonished face of Lulu Vance as he made the daring proposition.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FOR LOVE AND FOR GOLD.

LULU VANCE looked absolutely frightened at the bold proposition of Hugh Tapley.

Feeling indignant she said with anger:

"How dare you make such a proposition to me, sir?"

"Leave me at once, for I would be disgraced did my friends meet me with you, a servant."

"Oh, no, for not one of your friends would know me as a servant, but suppose me some friend, a stranger in town, so do not worry on that score."

"Leave me, sir, or Mr. Dawson shall hear of your conduct."

"So be it, and the world shall hear of your secret marriage, while I will get my hundred thousand anyway, and charity will get the millions of Daniel Dawson, not his wife."

"What do you mean?" gasped Lulu, pale with dread.

"I mean that Daniel Dawson has been a sinful man in the past, and he wishes to atone for it by leaving his millions to charity."

"He has a sneaking idea that by building and endowing a hospital he will save his soul."

"To do this, he intends to make a will, and as you are your father's only heiress, he will leave you only the sum he does me, one hundred thousand, where, as his wife, did he die without a will, you would get every dollar of these mil-

lions, a snug little sum for a young and beautiful widow."

"Is he worth so much?"

"Every dollar of it, and more."

"How did he make his fortune?"

"Ah! there's the secret, and that's what troubles him now."

"But his will would not hold in law?"

"It would the way he will make it, and with certain clauses inserted, for he means to bind you to lose all he does leave if you marry."

"Ah!"

"Now this will is not made yet, and he has been putting it off because he was feeling better."

"If he died without a will, you, as his wife, might claim all, do you see?"

"I see."

"And would get it all."

Lulu was trembling like a leaf.

She saw Almont Morency and his love rise before her.

She saw herself worth millions.

The tempter was doing his tempting well.

And he knew it.

"Then, too, how nicely you could arrange about the marriage."

"You could be called to his bedside in his last moments, and with but two witnesses, your father and myself, it would be very easily arranged, after Mr. Dawson died, to say that through his urgent entreaty you married him on his death-bed, you know."

Lulu was very nervous, very much excited, and the hand that held her reins trembled visibly.

"Do you think he will die before the year is out?"

"I am sure of it."

"But he is improving steadily."

"Do you wish to know why?"

"Yes."

"There is a certain cause of worry in his life, and it has pulled him down."

"There is remorse connected with it, and he has been expecting up to a couple of months ago, to meet one whom he had cause to dread."

"Then he saw in the papers the death of the man he so much dreaded, and from that very day he began to improve in health."

"He became like a different man, and almost got to be cheerful."

"I noticed all this, and decided that Mr. Dawson was good for another score of years."

"For a long time I have been with him."

"He pays me a very handsome salary, for in fact I draw wages as nurse, valet and secretary, and these three salaries allow me to lay up some ten thousand a year, for I have my expenses, and Mr. Dawson is generous to me about Christmas times and on my birthday with little financial souvenirs."

"But I cannot waste the best days of my life in waiting on him."

"I have some fifty thousand laid by, and was about to request that he give me my one hundred thousand before he died, so that I might go off and enjoy myself."

"But before I made the request, which I know would hit him hard, as I am invaluable to him, I learned by accident that the rumor of the death of the man he fears was not true."

"This Mr. Dawson must soon hear, and if the shock does not kill him at once, it will break him down again, and he will go off very rapidly."

"Under these circumstances I come to you."

"I can prevent his making a will, so that you will get all, but I wish just two hundred and fifty thousand from you in payment, as soon as you get full control of the estate."

"This shall remain as a dead secret between us, and I will go my way as soon as I get the money, leaving you to enjoy your millions in peace."

"Now, Miss Vance, for I will still call you so, you know just how we stand."

Conflicting emotions flashed through the brain of the beautiful girl as Taps unraveled his plot. She felt that she could not be blamed for the death of her husband.

She felt that if she got millions, it was worth the fee charged by the man for his services.

She was in love and she loved gold.

She would first however help her conscience by looking at the result should she refuse.

So she said:

"Suppose I refuse to do as you ask?"

"I get only my one hundred thousand, the Charity Hospital gets the millions, and you receive only a share that equals mine, while I will make your secret marriage known."

"That is the result of your refusal."

"Can it not be kept from Mr. Dawson that this person he dreads is alive?"

"I do not see how, as the man will harass him for the sake of revenge."

"And he has such a power over him?"

"He has."

"I would hate to see his death hastened, even if I became rich thereby."

"He is an old man, and if his sins in the past prey upon him, then you are not to blame."

"He has no ties in this country, for he came over here as an English lad, and he has millions to leave at his death."

"This, given to charity, he hopes will give him a passport to Heaven, and, after the present he has made you and the one hundred thousand he will leave you, he will consider, should he die before the year of secrecy expires about his marriage, that you will have ample, as your father, through him, is now a rich man."

"Then, too, he may wish to punish you for marrying him secretly."

"I see," said Lulu, in a low tone.

"Now let us turn back, Miss Vance, for you have my story and plot."

"I will escort you to your door and leave you there, for no one, not even Mr. Dawson, would recognize in your escort Taps, the valet, in his livery."

"You certainly are changed, and it would take a clever eye to recognize you."

"Oh yes, for take a gentleman—Mr. Almont Morency for instance—crop his hair and put him in livery, and no one would suspect him of being other than what he appeared."

"My wig, which looks most natural under my hat, aids greatly in my disguise."

"Now, Miss Vance, is it your written pledge to give me on demand, when the estate is all in your hands, the sum I demand, or is it to be as I have said in case of your refusal?"

They had turned back and were riding slowly along.

For a long distance Lulu did not reply.

Then she asked, as though having made up her mind:

"When do you wish this written pledge?"

"Write it to-night and mail it to me, for I get all the letters that come to the Dawson mansion."

"Delays are dangerous."

"I will write it," was the firm reply, and they rode rapidly on homeward, Lulu amazed at what an entertaining companion Mr. Hugh Tapley could be, when masquerading in the garb of a gentleman.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A HAUNTED HOME.

It had been an open winter thus far in the North, and little snow had fallen.

Early in the first month of the new year had come what is known as a "January thaw," and the weather was really warm.

Morency Manor was closed up still, Corks, Mrs. Gretchen and a few of the old faithful servants being in charge.

Tempted by the balmy weather, Mrs. Gretchen had thrown the whole house open for an airing.

Corks had received word that his master was to return soon, and more, that he was to bring back a bride with him.

But Corks and Mrs. Gretchen were to keep this secret between themselves.

"My wife is not in the health I could wish, so I will engage no extra servants, allow no visitors and live in quiet until she is improved, for I am sure life at Morency Manor will soon build her up."

"On this account I wish no report of my coming back to get out, and especially that I am married."

"Tell Mrs. Gretchen to have the house in perfect order."

This letter was dated at a port in South America, and had been two weeks in coming to its destination.

So it was that Mrs. Gretchen and Corks shook off the attack of laziness upon them, awoke from their winter's sleep, as it were, and began to get things "ship-shape for the master," as the butler said.

The house was still open, and Mrs. Gretchen was just thinking of closing it, and she and Corks sat in easy-chairs they had taken out upon the piazza, when the latter said:

"I'd give a month's wages, Maria Gretchen, to know what makes them mysterious sounds about the place o' nights."

"You mean the bells ringing, the thumping sounds and cries?"

"Of course, what else?"

"They bothers me."

"They almost scares me," added Corks.

"It was said the house was haunted in the long ago."

"Well, maybe it was; but I'll be glad when the master gets back so as to keep it open, for ghosts loves houses as are closed up."

"Oh, Mr. Corks, if it should be ghosts?"

Corks looked terrified.

"Well, I has heard that wailing at night like a man moaning in pain o' spirit."

"Have you opened the Murder Chamber, Mrs. Gretchen?"

"I have," and the "Murder Chamber" was the one where the mysterious midnight murder had been committed.

"And you saw no signs?"

"Ghosts don't have signs, John Corks."

"That is true; but maybe it is the murdered man as is getting lonesome and so wails about o' nights, rings bells and thump on the doors."

"I'd think he'd catch the chills."

"Ghosts is always chilly, Corks."

"That may be so; but it is growing dark, Mrs. Gretchen, so let us close the domicile up for the night."

They arose and proceeded to work, going first to the rear of the house.

Then Corks lighted a lamp and set it in the hall, knowing it would be dark when they retraced their way to the rear wing in which was the servants' hall and rooms.

They kept close together in shutting up the house, as by mutual consent not separating to go into the different rooms alone and thus expedite matters; when at last they had completely closed the very large and rambling mansion, they went to bring in the two chairs and shut the massive front doors.

Both had stepped out upon the piazza.

It was now twilight, and a storm was rising, for they saw heavy clouds hanging over the Sound, and the wind wailed mournfully through the bare branches of the trees and about the wings of the house.

"The Virgin preserve us! Maria Gretchen, look there!"

As Corks spoke, he crossed himself with one hand, while he pointed with the other to a white-robed form coming out of the woodland shadows, along the path that led to the Morency burying-ground, the white tombs of which could be seen in winter, when the trees were bare of foliage, a quarter of a mile distant in the Park.

Thus advised, Mrs. Gretchen looked, and a cry of horror arose to her lips, while she cried, in trembling tones:

"The ghost!"

What particular ghost she referred to, Corks did not know; but that it was a ghost was sufficient for him.

Mrs. Gretchen had already turned in flight, and, with no desire to take in the chairs, Corks fairly flew into the hall.

But he was a good general in retreat, for he closed the heavy doors behind him with a rapidity he had never executed the same task before.

He bolted them, locked them, and then, muttering prayers to the saints for the foresight he had shown in placing the lamp in the hall, grasped it and sped on in pursuit of Mrs. Gretchen.

Just then there came a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a crash of thunder, and the spring that Corks made blew out the lamp.

A yell of terror broke upon his ears, as a wild, mocking laugh, ending in a shriek, in the voice of a man, came from the front piazza, and his nerveless hands could hardly open the door leading into the servants' wing, and which Gretchen had closed behind her, leaving Corks a sacrifice to the ghost.

Dashing along the corridor, he bolted into the servants' hall white as a sheet.

Mrs. Gretchen was there, so was the cook and the coachman, and their manner showed their alarm.

A blazing log fire burned on the hearth, the lamps added light to the scene, a most tempting supper was spread out upon the table, and at once the courage of Corks arose.

He had light, he had, as it were, destroyed his bridges behind him, by locking the doors, and better still, he had company.

So he said, in a voice which his frightened face belied:

"Why did you run, Maria Gretchen?"

"What was it, Corks?" came the trembling reply.

"A ghost, sure, for I called to it and it made no reply."

"Then I closed the doors and came on, putting out the lamp to see if it had the power of appearing to me in the dark."

"I think it was the ghost of the murdered young man, Mr. Duncan Moore, Heaven rest his soul; but to make sure, before I go to bed to-night I will go to the Murder Chamber and see if his spirit haunts it."

Corks had talked bravely, to get up his courage.

"How brave you are, sure, Mr. Corks!" said the cook.

"And you are a brave man to face spirits, Mr. Corks," added the coachman.

Mrs. Gretchen by silence gave consent to these words of praise; but she had her own ideas on the subject, for she had, like Lot's wife, cast her eyes behind in her flight, and her only fear was that Corks would overtake and pass her, leaving her as a sacrifice to a prowling spirit.

The rain now descended in torrents, and this was a good excuse for Corks not to go around the house to see that all was well.

By a hearty supper all tried to drown their fears, and when they retired they left the lamps burning all over the servants' wing of the house.

Corks pretended to make a trip, lamp in hand, to the Murder Chamber, but he did not go out of the corridor of the servants' hall and stood there trembling with fright for ten minutes, when he returned and reported all quiet there in the dreaded room and about the house.

The storm still raged, and just as they all got into bed the farm-bell in the tower tolled dismally.

In the mean time the ghost in its long, white robe had ascended the piazza and taken a seat in one of the vacated chairs, seeming to enjoy the storm that now began to rage in fury over land and water.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE GHOST.

FOR a long while did the "ghost" sit in his chair upon the Morency Manor piazza.

He had given a weird laugh and cry as soon as he had reached the piazza, and then seemed content with the situation of affairs.

He drew his chair back out of the rain, and rocked to and fro with perfect complacency.

The storm was a severe one and the lightning and thunder incessant.

The surf of the Sound dashed with a roar upon the beach, and the winds howled mournfully about the Manor.

For a long time the ghost sat in apparent enjoyment of the scene.

Then he arose and drew off his white robe, which had concealed his head and entire form.

He appeared then in jet-black, hood and all, like a domino.

The white shroud-like robe was then rolled up and hidden under his black robe, and the ghost descended from the piazza and made his way to the bell-tower.

Taking the rope he began to toll the bell, striking thirteen taps.

In one wing of the mansion was a tower, and the main floor was used as a hall.

Separate steps led up to it, and the arched, narrow door, was opened by a pass-key, which Almont Morency alone carried.

But the ghost appeared to have gotten that key, or its duplicate, for he opened the door.

Then he threw down upon the floor what appeared to be an india-rubber blanket.

Upon this he stepped, and closing the door produced a dark-lantern.

By the light of this he took off an india-rubber coat, boots and cape hat.

These were laid upon the blanket, so as not to get a drop of water upon the floor, and placing around him once more his white shroud, he left the tower hall, and entered a corridor leading into a back parlor.

Through this he passed, as though familiar with the house, and crossing the main hall, thirty feet in width, he turned into a corridor leading between the large double parlors and art gallery, to the wing of the house in which was the Murder Chamber, this being on the lower floor.

The door was locked, but the key was on the outside, and for a long time the ghost stood regarding the room.

He appeared to be interested in everything that was in it, and going to the window gazed out into the storm.

Then he left the room and made his way back to the library.

Here he stood for some time, and stepping up to the desk safe coolly took out some keys and opened it.

He searched over the things found there, but took nothing, locked the safe and made his way once more into the hall.

Had Corks seen him then, gliding along in his shroud, with the dark-lantern turned toward him and shedding a halo of light over him, then Corks would have died.

Ascending the broad stairway to the floor above, the ghost turned into the wing over the Murder Chamber.

Here he came upon a charming suite of rooms.

There was a sitting-room, large, light and airy, and commanding by day a superb view of the Sound, its shores, and the grounds about the manor.

The room had only lounging chairs in it, a handsome bookcase, lounge and innumerable little pieces of *bijouterie*, while rare paintings adorned the walls.

Opening into this parlor was a large bedroom, elegantly furnished, with a dressing and bath-room attached.

These were the private rooms of the master of Morency Manor.

Returning to the sitting-room, the ghost stepped up to the massive chimney.

Over the fireplace was a painting; but it was hung by cords and tassels that fell upon either side.

Taking hold of these, the ghost drew gently upon them and the painting rose higher and higher toward the ceiling, revealing a square, massive iron door behind it, the presence of which never would be suspected.

There was a combination lock upon this, but the ghost seemed to understand the key, for he stood upon a chair and after a moment opened the heavy door.

An iron vault, a safe within, was revealed, some three feet square, with shelves and drawers for papers and valuables.

There were many things, too, that appeared of value in the safe, and among them a tin box.

The lantern the ghost had placed upon the table, and directly by it a tin box which he had brought with him.

To all appearances the two boxes were exactly alike, and there was some lettering upon the one brought the same as on that found in the safe.

The box taken from the safe was at once re-

placed by the one which the ghost had brought with him.

Then the ghost calmly sat down and looked over some papers he found in the safe.

He was an educated ghost, for he took out a pencil and paper and began to jot down notes.

This took him fully an hour.

Then he arose, returned the papers just as they were, closed the safe, lowered the painting, and, taking up the tin box and lantern, retraced his way as he had come.

He again put on his rubber clothing, and as if not caring now whether his shroud was wet or not, placed it once more over his form.

Taking up his rubber blanket, he searched the floor to see that he had left no trace of his presence, and then left the tower hall, closing the door with its spring lock behind him.

Going to the bell-tower he again tolled the bell thirteen times, awakening Corks & Co., and causing them to shiver with fright, and then, as a ghost should, he made his way back to the burying-ground.

But he did not seek rest there, but held on down the gravel drive to the gate, and thence on out into the highway.

Here he crossed the road to a thicket, and found there a horse hitched to a covered buggy.

The animal was well blanketed, but was restless under his long wait.

Then the ghost took off his dripping shroud, got into the buggy and drove away toward the city, the rain still descending in torrents and washing out the wheel-tracks.

The ghost was the mysterious chief of the Secret Detective League.

CHAPTER L.

MORENCY MANOR'S MISTRESS.

IT was true that Celeste Vivian had been seen on board a European steamer, lying at the dock in New York, as reported to the chief of the Secret Service League; but, ere that vessel sailed Almont Morency had arrived and said:

"My dear Celeste, there is no end of trouble, for I have just received word to go to Rio Janeiro, where some business interests I have there are in bad shape, so let us change our voyage and go southward instead of across the Atlantic. The Rio steamer is a fine one and it sails this afternoon."

"Where you go, I go, Almont," said Celeste, with a bewitching smile.

Wraps and luggage were hastily gathered together, and at the last moment they left the steamer, and taking a carriage were driven across to Brooklyn where the fine steamship of the South American Line was lying.

The best state-rooms in the vessel were obtained, and the comforts they had with them made Celeste and her husband as contented as possible.

Down the harbor soon sped the fine steamship, and by nightfall they were upon the broad Atlantic, their faces turned from the frigid north toward the balmy south.

A short while before Mrs. Evans had sailed for England The Pines had been closed up and had been put in the hands of an agent for sale.

In a country church, ivy-clad, and surrounded by the graves of the dead, Celeste Vivian had been made the wife of Almont Morency.

Other than the old clergyman and the sexton, no one was present to witness the solemn ceremony.

Then, as the sun was setting behind the distant hill-tops, Almont Morency placed in the hand of the old parson half a year's salary, while the sexton was dumb with amazement at his fee.

"You will oblige me, sir, by giving no publicity to this marriage, for at the proper time I will make it known," Almont had turned back to say to the parson.

Then, entering a buggy, drawn by two handsome horses, the wedded pair had driven rapidly away, Almont Morency holding the reins.

Such had been the marriage of Celeste Vivian.

Scarcely less secret was it than the ceremony that had, in her father's library, with him only as a witness, bound Lulu Vance to old Daniel Dawson.

A short while after her marriage, Celeste had sailed with her husband for South America.

He had told her why he had wished such a marriage, and, loving him, she had been content.

He was her idol, and where he led she was content to follow, all that he did she was willing to fall down and worship.

The voyage was a long one, for the seas were rough, and, though a good sailor, Celeste had suffered much, rather than gained by the trip.

South America she did not like.

Its strange cities and peoples she held little interest for, and she was content only in the society of her husband, and longed to get back to America.

"We can go to Europe," she said.

Whatever business it was that had brought Almont Morency to South America, it was soon arranged, and then he decided to return home.

"Just to please you, Celeste, we will return

home, and we will live quietly at Morency Manor."

She was overjoyed at this, and so Almont Morency wrote the letter which Corks had received, and which led to the opening of the manor on the day that the "ghost" had appeared.

One afternoon, early in February, Corks spied a tug coming inshore.

He watched the craft closely, and he saw that it was heading for the cove, the anchorage in front of the manor.

Several times had his master been known to come that way from the city, though the trip was an expensive one, and, to be on the safe side, he rushed around to the kitchen and hastily gave the news to Mrs. Gretchen, the cook and the coachman.

Then he jumped into his livery, threw open the windows, and going out upon the piazza saw that the tug was already in the cove.

He ran down to the shore, just as the tug, which was a comfortable one, glided alongside of the little pier.

The lines were made fast, and then out stepped Almont Morency, Celeste leaning upon his arm.

Their luggage was soon ashore, and Corks bowed low in welcome, saying to the beautiful young mistress of Morency Manor:

"It's the place will be all sunshine now, my lady."

"Welcome home, and you too, sir."

"Thank you, Corks," and with a smile Celeste held forth her hand.

The tug, having landed its passengers and baggage, backed off and headed cityward once more.

"All well, Corks?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any news?"

"No, sir."

"You got my letter?"

"Yes, sir, and the house is in apple-pie order, sir, for the coming of yourself and lady."

"I suppose I have considerable mail?"

"Yes, sir, and all is on your table."

"Any visitors?"

Corks was silent.

"Any visitors since I left, Corks?"

"Barring one, sir, not any."

"Who was that one?"

"Well, sir, I don't exactly know which of 'em it is, but it's one of 'em."

"One of who?"

"Of them over there," and Corks pointed to the graveyard.

"Over where?"

"The saints praise us, sir, the graveyard."

Almont Morency slightly started, but asked sternly:

"Who do you mean?"

"Them that's dead and gone, sir, or least-ways one of 'em, for that was all I seen and he was more than pleased me."

"Why, Corks, have you seen a ghost?" asked Celeste with a laugh.

"I have, ma'm."

"Don't be a fool, sir; but what did you see?"

"What Mrs. Gretchen saw, sir."

"And what did Gretchen see?"

"A ghost, sir."

"Corks, you are a fool, and Gretchen is another."

"Thank you, sir," and Corks was silenced for the time.

They had been walking along the while, and Celeste said:

"What a superb home is yours, Almont."

"I had no idea of its grandeur, and how lonely it must be in summer."

"It is, indeed; but here we are, Celeste, so welcome to *your* home," and he led her up the broad steps, just as Gretchen appeared in the door with a smile of welcome.

Corks at once went off to send Whip the coachman down to the wharf with a wagon after the luggage, and Celeste, who appeared fatigued, was taken at once to her rooms by Mrs. Gretchen.

"Oh! how beautiful."

"What a home for happiness!" cried Celeste, as she entered her rooms and gazed upon the beauty of all about her.

A fire blazed in the grate, the sunshine stole in the windows, and all was most inviting and beautiful, for Almont Morency had given a hint in his letter to Corks, as to which should be his wife's rooms, and Gretchen had done all in her power to add to their comfort and charm.

In the mean time, Almont Morency had gone to his library, and was busy looking over his mail, when Corks entered.

"Dinner at six as usual, sir."

"Now tell me what all this nonsense is about your seeing a ghost?"

Corks told how they had heard knocking, groans and bell-ringing at night, and then, the very day they had received his letter, that he and Mrs. Gretchen had seen the ghost.

"That night, sir, the farm bell tolled dimly, and it stormed fearfully; but the next morning we saw nothing more of the ghost, and have not since."

"Fools!" muttered Almont Morency.

"It was the ghost of the murdered young man, sir, I think."

Almont Morency made no reply, but went on opening his letters, and Corks departed, muttering to himself:

"He don't believe in ghosts; but wait until he sees one."

CHAPTER LI.

TAPS BEGINS WORK.

ANY one who studied the face of Mr. Hugh Tapley, or as he was known best, Taps, would have seen that he was cunning and bold.

He had a strongly marked face, for there was courage in it, resolution in his massive chin, and a foxy look out of his eyes when he was not on his guard.

He had been educated, that was certain, and he doubtless came of a good family; but he looked like a man who had gone to the bad at some period of his life, just because he found it easier to be wicked than good.

He was about thirty years of age, and, though the inference was that he was born a gentleman he appeared to be far more at ease in his livery as Daniel Dawson's valet than when he dressed in his best.

He had a smattering knowledge of medicine and made an excellent nurse.

He wrote a hand that was perfection, was a rapid accountant and had brains, so he was a valuable secretary.

He could dress well himself, was neat, and so made a good valet, while he was as patient as an Indian.

Who he was Daniel Dawson did not really know, but he had found him invaluable.

He had saved Dawson's life on one occasion, only could have done so, and he never had cause to complain of ingratitude upon the part of the man he kept from dying a horrible death.

Daniel Dawson was attached greatly to Taps, and he would never have kept him as a valet but for the desire of the man to be such.

To make up for the humiliation Daniel Dawson gave him five thousand a year as his secretary and adviser, for Taps was something of a lawyer, too, a hundred a month as a nurse, and half as much per month as valet, with occasional handfuls of gold.

Taps sung well, and played the piano, too, and thus entertained his master.

He was also a good card and chess-player, and his voice in reading was very melodious, so that Daniel Dawson was more than happy in the possession of such a man, especially as he was always near to awaken his master when horrid dreams would disturb his slumbers.

As for Taps liking Mr. Dawson, he was devoted to him, and yet had not the shadow of an affection for him.

He took all as a matter of course, and he knew no one whom he cared for, except himself.

Perhaps there was an exception.

That was Lulu Vance.

In his way he had fallen in love with the wife of his master.

"One-score and three-score should never wed; but one-score and thirty should," he said, and there was no doubt but what the reference was to himself and Lulu.

Taps was ambitious, and for him to decide upon a matter was to win if in the power of man to do.

One day, some little time after his ride with Lulu in the Park, Taps entered his master's library.

Old Dawson positively looked ten years younger than he did four months before.

He seemed spry as a youth, and looked almost cheerful.

He was seated in his easy-chair, reading, when Taps came in.

"I thought you wanted the afternoon off, Taps," said Mr. Dawson.

"I did, sir; but—"

Taps paused, and Daniel Dawson said:

"Do you want some money? If so, help yourself from my desk."

"No, sir."

"What is it, then?"

There was something in the face of Taps that alarmed Mr. Dawson.

"Taps, what is it?" and Mr. Dawson turned pale like a man with a guilty conscience.

"Mr. Dawson, don't be worried at what I tell you."

"But I am worried; come, what is it?"

Taps said, in a low, solemn voice:

"You heard he was dead?"

"I heard it! we both saw a notice of it!"

"My God! does he yet live?"

Mr. Dawson was the hue of a corpse now, great beads of sweat stood on his forehead, and his hands on the arm of his chair trembled so violently the fingers seemed to be beating a tattoo.

"He is alive, sir."

"No, no! it cannot be."

"I saw him, sir."

"My God! my God!"

The agony of the old man was awful to behold.

"You are sure, good Taps?"

"Could I be mistaken in that man, sir?"

"Might you not have been?"

"Not in face, form, voice and name, sir not in all."

"Where did you see him, Taps?"

"At the New York Hotel, sir."

The head of the old man now dropped in his hands, and his whole form shook with emotion. At last he said hoarsely:

"This unmans me, Taps, and I am all broken down."

"I thought him dead and so I gained courage and lived again."

"Now it will be the death of me I know, for I cannot rally again at my age."

"Come, Taps, help me to my room and to bed, and maybe it is best that I should die, for in the grave there is rest."

The old man was completely unmanned.

Most completely had the words of Taps to Lulu Vance been proven, that he would break down under the shock when he knew that a certain man, believed dead, was alive.

The next day Daniel Dawson did not get up, and word was sent to Mr. Vance that he was ill.

Lulu called with her father to see him, and both were shocked at the change twenty-four hours had made in him.

Several days after some business of an important nature, which Mr. Dawson had expected to attend to in person, came up, and Taps was sent to arrange it.

"Get back before night, Taps," urged the old man.

"I will, sir; but the business will take all the afternoon."

"I know that; but come by dark," was the pleading reply.

Taps left the room and went to his own chamber.

Then he opened a trunk and took out a desk. From this he took a paper.

Thrice he read it over, and it seemed to please him.

He seemed not in a hurry to look after this important business which he had told Mr. Dawson needed prompt attention.

The paper he held in his hand was as follows:

"NEW YORK, January 10th, 18—.

"I hereby agree to pay to Hugh Tapley, on demand, the sum of Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$250,000) the day after I come in full possession of the property of my husband, Daniel Dawson, millionaire."

"This claim to said Hugh Tapley to hold good under all circumstances."

"LULU VANCE DAWSON,
"Née Lulu Vance."

"That holds her," muttered Taps, and replacing the paper, he dressed himself with care, put on a stylish overcoat and high hat, and left the house.

CHAPTER LII.

THE MILLIONAIRE RECEIVES A VISITOR.

AN hour after the departure of Taps a servant entered Mr. Dawson's room, and told him that three gentlemen wished to see him.

"Tell them I am ill."

"I told them so, but they said that it was an important business matter, sir."

"Say I cannot see them."

In a moment the servant returned with:

"They say it is a matter of life and death."

"My God! who are they?"

"I never saw them before, sir, but one asked to come in."

"Let him come."

A moment more and a tall, solemn-looking man entered the room.

"Sorry to see you ill, sir."

"I am sorry to be ill; but be quick, please, with your business, for I am not able to be disturbed."

The solemn-looking man took a seat and said: "Mr. Dawson, I come here for your good, as well as the good of others, and it is best, as you are ill, to understand matters now."

"I have some papers that need your signature, and when that is done you will not be again disturbed, I am permitted to assure you."

"What papers?" gasped the millionaire.

"I will leave to another to explain what those papers are, for I know nothing about them, and he seems to wish to have the matter remain a secret between you and himself."

"Who is he?"

"I, sir, and a notary brought along to witness your signature, and I have with me the party referred to and one other as a witness."

"That party will have a private talk with you, and then he will call us in."

"I will ask if you know the contents of the papers and sign them willingly, and then I will subscribe to your signature, if in the affirmative, and the other one with us will write his name as a witness."

"Will you be my friend?"

"If I refuse?"

"I fear you will regret it, sir."

"Who is he?"

"One whom you met in the long ago."

"My God! I feared it."

And Daniel Dawson seemed deeply moved.

But after a moment he became calm and rung the bell for a servant.

"William, see that I am not disturbed by any one."

"Now, sir, I will see your friend."

The notary retired, and a moment after a man entered whom Daniel Dawson had not seen for years, and he cringed beneath his glance.

"You are ill, sir, so I will be merciful," said the stranger.

"Can you be?"

"Yes; for I feel that at last you will be willing to do justice."

"Daniel Dawson, let me tell you that it is only because you lie ill here and I believe your life is nearing its end that I spare you, for you know I could send you to the gallows."

"Oh, Heaven!"

"Do not worry yourself, for it rests with you whether you die in peace or not."

"Years ago, when in the mines of California, I saved you from death at the hands of the Vigilantes, who were going to hang you for stealing a horse."

"I saved you at the risk of my own life, and—"

"I know it but too well, so why remind me of it?"

"I wish to go over the story to show that I am really merciful."

"I took you, mere tramp that you were, to my mine, and we worked together."

"My mine panned out well, richly, in fact, and I paid you liberally for your work, for I gave you half of all the gold you dug out."

"I saw that I was going to be a rich man, and you saw it, too."

"One day a miner came to our camp telling me that a poor fellow whom I had also befriended had struck it rich in a far distant mine, and had been taken down with fever, and wanted me to come to him."

"I determined to go, and I left you in charge and set off."

"When I camped that night, and was lying asleep in my blankets, I heard a pistol-shot and felt a blow on the head."

"It seemed to me that I knew some one bent over me and put his hand on my wound."

"When I came to it was still night, my head was heavy, I was dizzy and my hair was matted with blood."

There was a gash on the side of my head made by a bullet, but it had not entered the skull nor broken the bone, and so I staggered to my feet, bathed my head and pressed on to see my sick friend."

"How I got there I hardly know; but I did do so, and I found him a very sick man."

"I nursed him for weeks and then he died."

"He had no kindred, he said, so he left me his mine, and he signed papers to that effect, witnessed by several."

"One man, a Mexican, who wished the mine, trumped up a charge against me of murder, and I was arrested and thrown into prison in a New Mexican town."

"Not a soul could I communicate with, not a friend did I have, and the misery that I suffered for three long years God only knows."

"But at last I managed to escape."

"I went to my mine, the one left me by my friend, and found that it had been dug clean of gold."

"I then returned to my other mine, where I had left you."

"It had shared the same fate; but there was one there who told me that you had become rich, very rich, and after sending all of my gold away, was leaving the country when a crowd of miners seized you and would have lynched you, but for your being saved by a young desperado, who took you under his charge."

"That desperado became your pard, and he had some one in the mines who wrote to him that I was not dead, and that made your guilty soul quake."

"You came to the far East and lived on my wealth, a millionaire."

"I, poor and wretched, had life to begin over."

"I had no money to follow you; but I vowed revenge, and went on the search of gold."

"After a long time luck came to me, and I struck it rich again."

"I worked hard to win a fortune, and at last I was repaid, and a glad day it was for me that I found myself a rich man, for I had work to do, revenge to satiate, and gold could alone help me."

"I took your track, and I tracked you well, for I discovered that you had been my intended assassin, having followed me to kill me, and you thought your aim had been deadly."

"I found that two of my friends who had gone to my mine to ask about me, had mysteriously lost their lives."

"In tracking you I also learned something of the deeds of the man who saved you from the lynchers."

"I came East slowly in search of you, and to aid me, had an account of my death published in all the papers by the name you knew me under in the mines."

"The bait caught, for you supposed I was dead, and so was not so particular about keep-

ing your name out of the papers, and one day I saw it.

"So, here I am, Daniel Dawson, ready to be merciful or wicked, as you desire me to be, and I come as a special officer from California, with a requisition for you, if need be, and one Hugh Tapley, also accused of murder.

"Your case is in your own hands, Daniel Dawson."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE TRIUMPH.

"You said you would be merciful," gasped the millionaire, who had heard the crimes of his life reviewed in silence, excepting now and then a groan would break from his lips.

"I will be if you are just."

"What can I do?"

"I will tell you."

"Every dollar you have in your possession is mine."

"It is true."

"You are a very rich man?"

"I am."

"Worth a million and more?"

"I realized from your mine hundreds of thousands of dollars, and I invested it in Western towns, which have increased in size and made for me money until I am worth something over three million dollars."

"A handsome sum indeed."

"All yours."

"So I consider it, and I have here an inventory of every piece of property you own, and its value, so I am glad to see you were honest with me."

"I will make a clean breast of it now."

"You are right."

"I have here a will drawn up, which speaks of all you own, and leaves every dollar of it to me."

"Besides, I have deeds drawn up selling to me, as it were, every piece of property in your name."

"These must all be signed, the will as well, and, should you die, this will says it is not to be opened until a certain date after your death."

"In consideration of your signing these papers, I will allow you to remain in this house your lifetime, furnish you with a very handsome income, and you can continue on just as you are now before the world."

"But Hugh Tapley must know nothing of this, not a hint of it shall you give him."

"Let me tell you that he is robbing you now, in many small ways, and let him so continue up to a certain date."

"My death."

"It might be, and if not, until I see fit to take Mr. Tapley in hand, for twice has that gentleman tried to end my days to keep me from tracking you out."

"In truth, he has hired men to assassinate me, and you know best whether you were aware of the fact."

"Upon my honor, no."

"You would have to swear by something more tangible than your honor, Daniel Dawson; but Tapley has his schemes, and he may have acted for a reason known best to himself."

"Now you know just how matters stand."

"You are to sign each and all of these papers and keep all that passes between us a dead secret."

"In return, you are to remain in your home here, live in the same magnificence as before, and remain here for life, if you will."

"Do you accept my offer, or will you force me to take you back to California for trial, and trial means death, for I have all proofs, I swear to you, to hang you and Hugh Tapley, too."

"I await your answer, Daniel Dawson."

"My God! do you know I am married?"

"Married!"

"Yes."

"You?"

"Yes."

"When were you married?"

"Only a short while ago."

"Where?"

"In New York."

"Can I put confidence in you?"

"Yes."

"Wholly?"

"Yes."

"My wife is a young girl, and our marriage was a secret one."

"Why should it be?"

"She urged it, and I consented."

"Strange."

"It is strange; but she is a wonderfully beautiful girl."

"Her father was in a tight place financially, and owed me large sums."

"We compromised on the girl's becoming my wife, but she swore me to secrecy for a year."

"She married you to save her father?"

"Well, I suppose so, and because she wanted to be enormously rich, and because she wanted to be man's darling."

"This is true?"

"I swear it."

"Her father is again all right financially."

"Yes; but may not remain so, for he is a reckless financier."

"And you intended to leave her your wealth?"

"No; I intended to leave her a handsome income, and atone for the past by giving all else to charity, excepting a hundred thousand Tapley was to have."

"Well, I am glad you told me this, and don't you deceive this girl wife of yours, but let matters go on as before, giving her presents as you doubtless have been doing."

"Now I would like to have a look at Tapley's papers."

"He keeps them in his trunk in his room."

"I have a man who can pick the lock."

"The servant would see him go up-stairs."

"Call the servant and send him off on an errand."

"If you take anything, Tapley will know it."

"I shall take nothing, but merely let my man look over his effects."

"I have to yield."

The servant was called and dispatched on an errand that would take some time, and the man who was to be a witness was sent up to Tapley's room with instructions to pick the lock of the trunk, make hurried notes of papers found there and return.

Then the papers were read to Daniel Dawson, and the notary was called in, and the witness returning, the papers were duly signed and witnessed.

"Now, Daniel Dawson, if you need me, send to this address for me."

"I will come," and the three men left the room.

The servant returned just then, and the Californian said:

"My man, Mr. Tapley might be angry to think we bothered his master, so do not speak to him of our visit," and the man was fairly dumb to find half a dozen five-dollar gold-pieces dropped in his hand.

"Not a word, sir, not a word," he cried, in his delight, and the visitors departed, while Daniel Dawson murmured:

"At last the blow I dreaded has fallen, and the end has come."

"It is better so, and thank God it is all over."

CHAPTER LIV.

A DEATH-BED TIE.

THOUGH the mind of Daniel Dawson was easier after the blow had fallen upon him and he had met the man whom he had tried to kill and had so cruelly wronged, he was physically unable to rally and grew worse instead of better.

Mr. Hugh Tapley returned from his business trip to find his master considerably excited, he thought.

"I fear I shall not last long, Hugh," he said.

"Taps, sir, Taps, you know."

"Ah, yes; but do not correct me now, for you were Hugh to me once, and you served me well and have been very faithful."

"I have tried to do my duty by you."

"I know it, and I only wish your reward would be greater; but we have been great sinners, Hugh."

"Curse it! don't begin to harp, Dawson," retorted Mr. Tapley, with anger.

"I feel remorse, Hugh, remorse, and that is what has been killing me."

"Lord! you'll be sending for a preacher next, old man."

"No, I will not, Hugh; but I wish you would repent."

"Repent in a horn!" was the scornful response of Mr. Tapley.

Daniel Dawson sighed. He knew what Hugh Tapley did not even suspect.

That night, strange to say, Daniel Dawson slept soundly.

But he did not awake any better in the morning.

When Hugh Tapley gazed at him he saw that the end was not far off.

Lulu Vance came often with her father, and one night the two were summoned by Hugh Tapley to the bedside of Daniel Dawson.

"Who was your parson?" asked Hugh Tapley, as Lulu waited in the library while her father entered the sick-room.

"The Reverend James Crabbe."

"What address?"

Lulu gave it to him and asked:

"Why do you wish him?"

"You must be married here publicly, before witnesses, for Daniel Dawson consents, as the private ceremony might be disputed."

"You know best," was the answer, and a servant was dispatched for the Reverend James Crabbe, while Lulu entered the room where lay the dying man.

"My master thinks, sir," said Taps, humbly, "that the marriage should be public now, so I have sent for the Reverend Mr. Crabbe to again perform the ceremony, before the doctor, who will soon arrive, the butler and myself as witnesses, sir," and he addressed Mr. Vance.

That gentleman was willing for anything that would bind his daughter more firmly to this dying millionaire, and he said so.

Lulu was anxious, also, and the dying man was simply passing quietly away.

The Reverend Crabbe was a prompt man.

He was a man who looked upon his religious duties as a business not to be neglected, and he came promptly at the call, for he had still a balance of a magnificent fee which Daniel Dawson had paid him for the secret marriage, and which Merchant Vance had duplicated, while Lulu had presented him with a very handsome present for his rectory.

The servant had said he was to marry some one, so he came in with a bland smile, which faded into a look of pious misery when he learned from the butler:

"The master is dying, your Reverence."

The Reverend Crabbe was slightly taken aback when told by Mr. Vance that he was to marry over again Daniel Dawson to Lulu Vance.

It seemed to reflect upon his ecclesiastical powers, to reflect upon the connubial knot which he had also tied.

But the merchant talked, and the words fell like the Balm of Gilead upon his troubled soul, when he found that the millionaire wished to make the marriage public, and to avoid letting it be known that there had been a secret ceremony, have the old man and the young girl, this January and July, tied by a double knot.

And so, as the doctor had arrived, the butler and the cook were called in, and the three, with Taps, were to be witnesses alone of this strange wedding of life and death.

The dying millionaire pronounced the responses firmly, and they were the last words he ever uttered.

The Reverend Crabbe dove-tailed a prayer for a dying man onto the end of the marriage ceremony, and then Merchant Vance drew him aside and said in a low tone:

"Change the date, please, to to-day," and, as though it might be an expensive undertaking, he handed him a well-filled purse.

Taps saw him out to the carriage, and feeling interested in his services rendered, handed him a roll of bank-notes with the remark:

"Master told me to give you this, sir, for the poor."

And Taps lied; but the parson did not know it, and drove home with the idea that he knew the poor who most needed that donation.

And so Daniel Dawson died, quietly passing away as though going into a deep slumber, with no sign upon his face of the cruel remorse he had suffered for deeds done in the far past.

And back to their home drove the young bride and her father, both silent, but, in their hearts both happy, for the thought would haunt them that the death of Daniel Dawson had left his beautiful bride the possessor of millions.

CHAPTER LV.

LULU'S PROPHECY.

SINCE her coming to Morency Manor, Celeste did not appear to be the happy woman she had been when she gave her love to Almont Morency.

A shadow seemed to have come between them.

Her husband was cold but courtly in his manner toward her, yet he seemed to shun her.

He had told her that she did not love him, and she had wondered if he spoke the truth.

And so they lived, the young wife never going beyond the gate into the highway, and her husband also keeping most secluded.

Now and then he would go the city for a day or two.

Thus the weeks passed, and the two were silently drifting apart.

One morning in the spring when the trees were beginning to bud, the grass had become green and the birds were chirping merrily, Almont Morency was seated in the summer-house near the shore.

Presently Corks appeared bringing his mail, and several letters were hastily read and cast aside.

Then he turned to the papers, and suddenly started as a head-line caught his eye.

"A STRANGE MARRIAGE."

"AN OLD MILLIONAIRE ON HIS DEATH-BED WEDS AN HEIRESS."

"DAWSON—VANCE."

"Our readers have all heard of the millionaire bachelor, Mr. Daniel Dawson who died last week, and was buried with such pomp in his late palatial residence on Twenty-third street."

"It now transpires that Mr. Dawson became a Benedict upon his death-bed."

"He had long loved the beautiful daughter of his most intimate friend, Henry Vance, the rich merchant of Broadway and begged, almost with his last words, that she should become his wife."

"Urged by a dying man, she consented, and thus she becomes the mistress of her late husband's millions, for she will receive all excepting a few legacies to old servants."

"We sympathize with the young widow in the death of her noble husband, and yet congratulate her upon her good fortune in becoming the possessor of millions by her very romantic marriage."

"A long life and happiness to Miss Lulu Vance Dawson."

Having read the notice over and over again, while his face flushed and paled by turns, Al-

mont Morency sprang to his feet and walked rapidly to the mansion.

"Pack my traveling-bag for me, Corks, and order my pair of grays put to my buggy, for I have to go at once to the city."

"Where is my wife?"

"In the garden somewhere, sir."

"Say to her that I was called to the city, and may be absent some days."

"Yes, sir."

Half an hour after Almont Morency was on the road to Brooklyn.

The next afternoon he ascended the steps of Merchant Vance's brown-stone mansion and rung the bell.

The servant recognizing him as an old friend of the family admitted him, and took his card up to the young widow.

A few moments after Lulu swept into the room, looking most queenly in her robe of deepest sable.

"Why, when did you return from South America?" she asked, after a warm grasp of the hand.

"Only lately."

"Did you receive my letter from Rio?"

"Yes, and answered it."

"Strange that I never received it."

"You did not receive it?"

"I did not."

"Then it miscarried, and I am sorry, for I wrote you a long letter, telling you that Celeste had gone to Europe with her companion, Mrs. Evans, and that the place was offered for sale, and I thought of buying it, for I was charmed with it, you know."

"Yes, I remember."

"What do you think of my romantic marriage to a dying man?" at length asked Lulu, as he did not refer to her being in black.

"I only read of it yesterday," was the reply, and then he added: "Tell me all about it, if you will."

It was just what she wished to do, and she told all, but did not speak of the first marriage, that was a secret.

"The house is closed now, I suppose?"

"Mr. Dawson's secretary, Mr. Hugh Tapley, is there in charge, and will be until the reading of the will, which a whim of my—Mr. Dawson ordered should not be read until a certain date, and which is some time off yet."

After a stay of an hour Almont Morency arose to depart and Lulu said:

"Return and dine with us at six; father will be anxious to see you, and I would like to claim you every day to dinner while you are in town, for there is much I wish to ask your advice about, and I feel as though you were my brother, you know."

"Thank you, I will accept, though I do not know how long I will be in the city, as I came upon important business."

And Almont Morency took his leave, while as the door closed behind him Lulu Dawson said, in a low, earnest tone:

"I shall win him!"

CHAPTER LVI.

THE UNKNOWN'S STORY.

It was the day after the departure of Almont Morency for the city, and Celeste sat alone in her room.

Her eyes were turned upon the waters of the Sound, but she seemed to be lost in meditation rather than enjoying the scenery.

Suddenly a vessel changed its course and headed in toward the cove, and this attracted her attention.

It was a pretty steam yacht and came on like the wind.

She watched it and said:

"It is my husband returning, and he doubtless has purchased that pretty craft."

"I suppose he will be angry if I do not meet him and go to see his vessel."

So saying she arose, and, leaving the mansion, walked down to the arbor near the cove, just as a tall form sprang ashore and approached her.

She started back and sunk down upon the seat as her eyes fell upon the man, for there was something in his appearance that startled her.

"Mrs. Morency, I believe?" he said, raising his hat and displaying a head of snow-white hair.

"Yes, sir."

"Your husband, Mrs. Morency, is in the city, and I came to see you."

"I have come to tell you a strange story, and though it may pain you deeply, I wish you to listen to every word I say."

"You are a brave, strong woman, so control yourself and hear me."

She was silent, and yet calm, for there was something in the man's manner that calmed her, and he seemed to magnetize her.

"To begin my story I will tell you that many years ago this house was occupied by a gentleman and his two sons."

"One of those sons was supposed to have committed forgery for a considerable sum, using his father's name, and he was driven out of doors by his angry parent to go anywhere, to

starve, to die, if he could not take care of himself."

"After he left, it was found that he was a boy gambler, and sins innumerable were heaped upon him."

"The other son remained with his father, grew up to be honored by all, and, at the death of his father, was left his entire property."

"That good son is Almont Morency, your husband."

"So matters appeared upon the face of affairs; but, they were not true, in reality."

"The son, who had been driven from his home, went to sea, drifted about from land to land as a sailor, returned to America via San Francisco and started to the mines to hunt a fortune."

"He was lucky, for he struck a good lead, and was growing rich, when one whom he had befriended attempted to assassinate him when he was going to visit a dying comrade."

"The assassin failed, and this young Morency went on to his friend, who died and left him a fortune in his mine."

"But, he was not allowed to enjoy it, for he was seized, thrown into a prison in New Mexico and kept there for three years, having committed no crime."

"Escaping, he sought the mine left him, but it had been worked out."

"He sought his own old mine."

"It was worthless, and his false friend had fled with his gold."

"But, young Morency did not despair. He prospected and again found a mine and at last made a second fortune."

"Men who had befriended him he aided, and, at last, with riches at his command he came East to hunt down the proofs that he was not the forger he was accused of being."

"A friend, strangely like him in appearance, accompanied him, and the two were to search together to prove Morency's innocence."

"He, Morency, began the work by looking up a man who lived in the country near a certain village."

"He was caught one night in a storm, and while riding on horseback along the highway beheld a house breaking out in flames."

"He dashed on, and was fortunate in saving the lives of some of the inmates and escaped unknown, as he wished to remain."

"But he was badly burned and injured, and after he reached the city was confined for a long while to his bed."

"His friend, Duncan Moore by name, begged to come to this place and see Almont Morency and glean what he could, and taking advantage of his likeness to him claim to be his absent brother."

"He came, and was murdered in his room that night."

"I have heard it," cried Celeste.

And her eyes were riveted upon the face before her.

"Yes; he was murdered, and Egbert Morency, for such is his name, grew more and more suspicious and determined to solve every mystery connected with the past of Almont Morency."

"He set about his task well, for, with unlimited means at his command, he formed a Secret Service League."

"In this were both men and women. All had their duties to perform, and Egbert had spies upon even them, so that there should be no such thing as failure in his plots and plans."

"There was much for him to do, and he sent for another friend, a miner true as steel, to aid him."

"He wished to trace the man who had tried to kill him, and who he knew was rolling in the wealth he had stolen."

"He wished to run to earth every foe of his past and avenge himself to his heart's content."

"For this the League was formed, and, unknown himself, he governed his people well and thoroughly."

"You may have heard from your gossiping housekeeper how this place was twice robbed, once by an old man who was a guest for a night, and next by a mother and daughter who came here?"

"I have heard," came in a low tone.

"Well, they are in the service of Egbert Morency."

"But the box that they got was restored to Almont Morency, and, one night, while Almont was in South America, a ghost appeared, and that ghost got that box, leaving a *fac-simile* of it in the safe, which Almont Morency yet thinks is the real one."

"Why he kept the papers it contains I cannot understand, for it shows who was the forger; and more, it shows that the father of Egbert and Almont Morency died from poison!"

"The shadowers of this Unknown Chief scented out the intended assassin of Egbert Morency and found him in the person of Daniel Dawson, the millionaire, and they found his companion in crime with him in the person of Hugh Tapley, both of these men guilty of murder."

"And more: they found out that Miss Lulu Vance had secretly married old Dawson, intending to get his millions and then marry Almont Morency."

"They discovered that you had secretly married Almont Morency, and that he had been the forger and had placed the crime upon his brother—that he had taken the credit of saving the life of yourself and the lives of others that night of fire at the Doremus Academy."

"The League detectives discovered that Almont Morency was a gambler, had squandered his fortune at the gaming-table, and was leading two lives—that, as an Unknown Chief, he was the leader of a band of smugglers and burglars—that he owned two vessels that brought stolen booty to his coffers, and he sold them to a man who pretended to be a Jew, but who had been ruined by Almont Morency at the card-table, and had taken to a vile life to regain his fortune."

"The League shadowers discovered that no one ever knew Almont Morency in his true character; they traced the death of his father to Almont's hand, and ascertained that he had murdered Duncan Moore and robbed himself to hide the crime; they found out that he had married you secretly for your money, and that he wished to get rid of you to marry Lulu Vance."

"Only day before yesterday he went to the city, where he learned that Lulu had married the dead millionaire, and that she does not know of his marriage to you. But for the trap being sprung, this very morning, in which he was caught, your life would have been in danger."

"When he married you, he cut loose from his outlaw associates and covered his tracks behind him, for you had money to support him."

"He has been a forger, the vilest of gamblers, a murderer, a duelist, a thief—yes, all that is most wicked and base—and he meant more rascality."

"His startling resemblance to his brother—for they are twins—caused him to play the rôle of rescuer that night of fire to deceive you."

"Now, Mrs. Morency, I have told my story, and I have the evidence to prove all that I say. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, and more: I will tell you that I had not been married to Almont Morency one week before I began to find him out. I discovered that he was not the *beau idéal* I had loved: I found a letter written to him from Lulu Vance, which I opened inadvertently, saw the beginning and then read."

"What a monster in human form that man is! and for him, and through him, you have fearfully suffered, for you are Egbert Morency!"

"I am, though my hair is snow-white now, turned in one night, after I discovered all that my brother was."

"Yes, I am Egbert Morency."

"The one who saved my life that fearful night! How cruelly was I deceived!"

"Yes, most cruelly."

"And that man, my husband?"

"Is a prisoner in my secret quarters, for I had him arrested this morning, along with Hugh Tapley, the friend of Daniel Dawson."

"And poor Lulu?"

"Is in New York; but your sympathy is wasted upon her."

"And Almont Morency?"

"Will he be hanged?"

"It remains for you to say."

"Shall I let him go, on condition that he leaves America forever, or shall I give him over to the law?"

"Do what you deem your duty. Now I must go to my room, for I am very tired—very unhappy."

She would not allow him to accompany her, and went on to her room.

An hour after she was raving with delirium, and Egbert Morency was on his way back to the city.

CHAPTER LVII.

CONCLUSION

WHEN the yacht bearing Egbert Morency reached the city, he hastened up to his quarters, and Lomax met him as he entered his rooms.

"Something has gone wrong, Lomax."

"Yes, he has taken his own life."

"God be praised! he has saved himself from the gallows. How was it?"

"He sat there talking to me, in his irons, and confessed everything, asking me to write it down and he would sign it. I did so, and there is his signature, badly written."

"He then said:

"'Lomax, I am not one to die except in my own way, and I have just taken a poison which I have carried with me for many a day. I ask no forgiveness, have no regrets.'

"'A last good-night.'

"'This was all, sir, and though I sent for aid it was too late; he was dead.'

"'It was better so, and I will now send for the chief of police and report all to him.'

"'Have all the people been paid off and dismissed as I directed?'

"'Yes, all.'

"'And that traitor released from his prison and paid, too?'

"'Yes, sir, and he left with a glad heart.'

"And Hugh Tapley?"
 "Is in the other room, in irons."
 "I will deliver him up to the chief of police, with all papers proving his guilt, and he will be taken to the West and hanged."
 "And Mrs. Dawson?"
 "I will go and see her as soon as I have seen the chief, for the will of Daniel Dawson is to be read to-morrow, and she may as well know all to-night."

The chief of police came and heard all of the strange story.

Then he took Hugh Tapley in charge and also the body of the suicide, Almont Morency.

"I congratulate you, sir, upon your wonderful work, and, as you say, nothing need be made public other than that your brother was the forger and sacrificed you, and upon your return committed suicide after making full confession."

An hour after Egbert Morency was in the parlors of the Vance mansion, and Lulu, in bitterest anguish, learned how she had been thwarted from getting her husband's supposed fortune and that Almont Morency had committed suicide.

Her father also bemoaned his misfortunes, for he was again in a financial quagmire and had depended upon his daughter to help him out once more.

But he had to go to the wall, and he and Lulu would have been beggars but for the generosity of Egbert Morency who gave them a comfortable, if not a luxurious living.

As for Hugh Tapley, he was taken out West and hanged, and soon after his return, for he carried the prisoner, Fred Lomax was married to Eleanor Balfour, and they were given as a bridal present from Egbert Morency, The Pines, for Lomax had an income large enough to support a luxurious home.

Carl Berghelm, his right name being Trevor Coleton, got alarmed after this Masked Unknown withdrew from the business they were in together, sold out, and, burying his past evil deeds, reformed and married the woman of his love.

Caspar Carr left the island when Captains Dorcas and Fogg were captured and sent to prison for smuggling, and no one ever knew what ever became of his wife and himself.

And Celeste?
 For long weeks she lay at the point of death, raving with brain fever.

But Egbert Morency sent the best physicians and nurses in New York to watch over her, and at last she rallied.

It was a long, long time before she recovered sufficiently to make a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Lomax at The Pines, for they had been at Morency Manor with her in her illness.

But at last she did go, and then went with them to Europe.

One day in Italy, just one year after the death of her wicked husband, they were joined by Egbert Morency.

Celeste was looking more beautiful than ever, and never had Egbert Morency looked so handsome, in spite of his gray hair.

Was it a wonder that she loved him, for Almont had won her love under false pretenses, and Egbert told her that she had been the idol of his heart since the night he had saved her life.

And so they were married, and back to Morency Manor they went to dwell in happiness, for they wisely let

"The dead past
 Bury its dead."

Such was the destiny of the Dead-set Detective.

THE END.

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- 119 Mustang Sam; or, The King of the Plains.
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- 144 Dainty Lance the Boy Sport.
- 151 Panther Paul; or, Dainty Lance to the Rescue.
- 160 The Black Giant; or, Dainty Lance in Jeopardy.
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- 203 The Boy Pards; or, Dainty Lance Unmasked.
- 211 Crooked Cale, the Caliban of Celestial City.
- 310 The Barranca Wolf; or, The Beautiful Decoy.
- 319 The Black Rider; or, The Horse-Thieves' League.
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- 355 The King of the Woods; or, Daniel Boone's Last Trail.
- 419 Kit Fox, the Border Boy Detective.

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- 516 Tartar Tim; or, Five Points Phil's Menagerie.
- 526 North River Nat, the Pier Detective.
- 533 Wrestling Rex, the Pride of the Sixth Ward.
- 541 Jeff Flicker, the Stable Boy Detective.
- 551 Nick Nettle, the Boy Shadow.
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- 569 Brooklyn Ben, the On-His-Own-Hook Detective.
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- 193 Captain Mask; or, Patent-Leather Joe's Defeat.
- 219 Despard, the Duellist; or, The Mountain Vampires.
- 338 A Tough Boy; or, The Dwarf's Revenge.
- 363 Little Tornado; or, The Outcasts of the Glen.
- 373 Little Jingo; or, the Queer Pard.
- 388 Little Oh-my; or, Caught in His Own Trap.
- 401 Little Shoo-Fly; or, A Race for a Ranch.
- 408 Little Leather-Breeches; or, Old Jumbo's Curse.
- 431 Little Ah Sin; or, The Curse of Blood.
- 451 Colorado Kate, A Tale of the mines.
- 480 Three Jolly Pards.
- 517 Jim Gladden's Deputy.
- 527 The Jolly Pards to the Rescue.
- 547 Sandy Andy; or, A Good Man Down.
- 556 Lariat Lili; or, The Cat for a Life.
- 574 Old Wensel-top, the Man with the Dogs.
- 593 Keen Clem, the Ranch Imp.
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BY CAPTAIN FRED. WHITTAKER.

- 15 The Sea-Cat; or, The Witch of Darien.
- 29 The Dumb Page; or, The Doge's Daughter.
- 43 Dick Darling, the Pony Express Rider.
- 150 Lance and Lasso; or, The Children of the Chaco.
- 154 The Sword Hunters; or, The Land of the Elephant Riders.
- 159 The Lost Captain; or, Skipper Jabez Coffin's Cruise to the Open Polar Sea.
- 300 The Boy Bedouins; or, The Brothers of the Plumed Lance.
- 214 Wolfgang, the Robber of the Rhine.
- 249 Milo Romer, the Animal King; or, The Round the World Wanderer.
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- 246 Giant George; or, The Ang'l of the Range.
- 275 Arizona Jack; or, Giant George's Pard.
- 297 The Tarantula of Taos; or, Giant George's Revenge.
- 307 The Strange Pard; or, Little Ben's Death Hunt.
- 318 Ker-whoop, Ker-whoop; or, The Tarantula of Taos.
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- 332 Frio Fred; or, The Tonkaway's Trust.
- 344 The Fighting Trio; or, Rattlesnake, the Tonkaway.
- 349 Wild Wolf; or, Big-Foot Wallace to the Front.
- 357 The Ranch Raiders; or, The Siege of Fort Purgatory.
- 364 Snap-Shot, the Boy Ranger.
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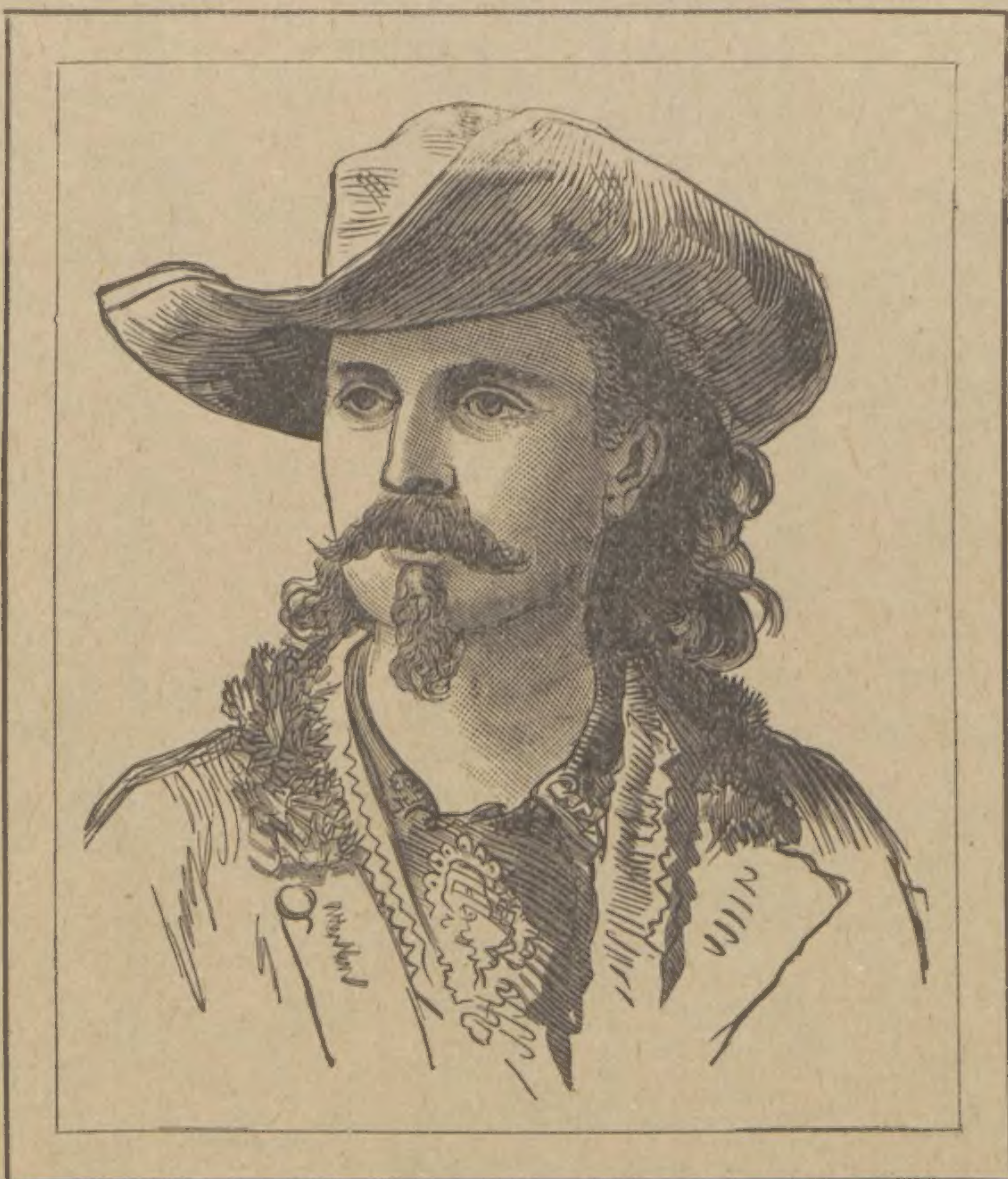
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